

DOOD  
+ COOKED FOOD  
AND INNKEEPERS  
PARENTS

DR RIDGE'S  
FOR INNKEEPERS  
PARENTS

# LONDON SOCIETY.

APRIL, 1898.

## A Trial Trip.

By Capt. H. WILLING.

IN THREE PARTS.

### PART I.—CHAPTER I.

JACK and I are trying to live on next to nothing—not to make any mystery—on one hundred and four pounds a year—of course a great many people do live on that, and bring up large families. I know that, but they are lucky people, and have grown up like that—I am not, I am one of the unlucky sort, who pay twenty pounds for a “little frock,” not from extravagance; it seems quite cheap, till the total of one season’s wear comes in and surprises one, as do the hats and boots and “things” that make up the necessities of women who wear my sort of “little frocks”—and Jack for eight years was a “Cavalry” ornament to his admiring country, after that he tired of the army “came into” his mother’s money (he was a younger son) and married me—that was nearly ten years ago—between us we had only twenty-five thousand pounds—that is all gone—not that we were extravagant, we only lived like other people, and being poorer than most, of course we were unlucky. Jack’s “certainties” generally turned out a certain failure. My little “fortnightly flutters,” ended badly, and bills came rolling in, and to pay we drew on our capital, after which it did not take us long to discover the truth of the French saying, “Les fonds entamés ne pait pas de rentes.”

Well, we got out of it without any horrid bankruptcy business, we paid our debts, and a kind old uncle of mine (himself a hard-up Irish Peer) makes us the aforementioned allowance, and has promised that whatever he can leave me he will.

So we left our native heaths, and the sweet shadyside; and Bond

Street, Paris, Monte Carlo, and Cowes know us no more; none of those places are even on bowing acquaintance with one hundred a year (plus four pounds.)

This all happened just ten months ago, and the question was "Where should we go?"

I remember it all so well. We were quite ready to depart, all the servants were paid off and gone, it was rather nasty seeing them go, still there are not many old servants now (except in novels), and though they all expressed polite sorrow at our change of fortune, yet I fancied that, as they all expected the end long before we did, they had prepared for it very comfortably. The last to go was my own maid, and such a good maid—of course a French woman, or rather a Parisian; I think she was sorry, at least she insisted on remaining to wash up, and take away our breakfast—though I don't think she knew how to do it any more than I did myself, but it was nice of her, and there was a funny lump in my throat that fine April morning as I watched from the window the four-wheeler that bore her and her huge "Saratoga" trunk away; it also carried off three parts of my own good looks, for a clever lady's-maid always holds so much, if not more in her keeping, and I was by no means philosophical enough not to grieve over that—so I stood as I say, that Spring morning (just the beginning of the season too) in the pretty half dismantled dining-room of our house in Green Street.

It was the dearest little house in every sense of the word. We had been fortunate too about it. A friend who was just married had taken it and the heavy furniture off our hands. Wedding presents had set them up of course with nic-nacs, plate and ornaments, so we had sold off all our pretty things, and the dining-room in consequence sympathized with me, looking altered and gloomy.

"Cheer up, little woman," said Jack, joining me at the window, and looking very handsome. He was a fine tall fellow, six foot one in his stockings. I told you he had been an ornament to the service.

"What a fine morning," he went on, possibly by way of consolation. "Come and sit down, and let us settle where we shall go, for you know we must go somewhere."

He put his arm round me, I liked it, it was rather a comfort to me, though it is a useless enough arm, except for killing things, and I suppose it won't be wanted for that any more. Shoots are not for us. We sat down in what I used to call our "Morocco Corner,"

just big leather cushions, little carved stools that didn't rock, and held bottles, syphons, and a small smoking-table.

Jack lit his pipe, and handed me a cigarette.

"Oh no! I must give that up" I expostulated.

"Never mind, you may as well finish these," said Jack calmly.

For a little time we smoked in silence, then Jack got up, shook himself, put down his pipe, and looming large before me, demanded—

"Well, Dickie"—my right name was Gwendoline—"have you decided where we shall go?"

"I haven't, Jack," looking up at him helplessly—I'm rather a poor thing, though when we had money you would not have noticed it—"Let us go somewhere, Jack, where there is nobody."

"That would be a far cry, I fancy," said Jack with a laugh, "besides, in out of the way places there is always just the one person you don't care to meet. You see," he continued "we have just about forty pounds left from the sale of the sticks, besides Lord Gaunt's two pounds a week—good old boy." He thrust his hand deep into his knickerbocker pocket, and brought out notes, gold, silver and copper.

"Oh Jack!" I screamed, "all the money we have in the world, and you carry it loose in your pocket?"

"Where should I carry it?" with *surprise* "in a pockethandkerchief? Here, little woman, take it, and do what you like with it, you have every right to it; but for your old uncle we'd be starving," and Jack laughed rather bitterly.

"Don't be cross," I said, nevertheless handing him ten pounds; I carefully put the rest away, at one side of my purse, closing the ring over it, and holding the little bag up to Jack with a triumphant "there!"

"Well now perhaps you will decide where we shall go to," said Jack. "Shall we go to Boulogne?" added he as I again looked up at him, in a hopeless way.

"Oh! no, that would never never do"—and memories of the "petits chevaux" raced and danced before my eyes.

"Then let us go into Hampshire," said my spouse, "we will find some nice quiet little hotel, and at all events I will get some good fishing."

"Oh! yes," I fired at him scornfully, "I know your *nice* quiet

little hotels, where they feed you on tough beef, and charge you more than at the Metropole."

"I give it up then," said Jack, subsiding into a chair, and taking up his pipe.

"I have an idea," I reported, after a portentous silence.

"I am glad to hear it," said Jack.

"You remember," I continued, "a girl I once knew, who ran away with a man?"

"I remember a great many of your sex, who bolted with men," he remarked.

"Don't be silly, I don't mean married people, it was that girl Ada Talfort, who ran away with that stupid Ross man, because her father would not allow the marriage. Well, they had hardly any money! And after they were married they did not know where to go; then they bought a newspaper."

"And found it all black and white, I suppose," said Jack, finishing my story and seizing "The Morning Post" at the same time.

"Now find something," said I triumphantly, feeling I had done my share of the business, but apparently even with the aid of the paper, it was not so easy. Bournemouth, Brighton, Eastbourne, St. Leonard's, all offered attractions to the impecunious, at this time of the year. But all were rejected for the same reason, that "somebody" might be there.

At last, "Southend-on-Sea" read out Jack.

"Where is Southend?" I interrupted.

"Oh, it is somewhere beyond Gravesend."

"Nobody ever goes there."

"I don't think so," I certainly never did."

"Then that's the place for us!" I eagerly cried.

"Well, we can get back again for a few shillings," said Jack, "that's one blessing. I'll get a cab and have the traps taken down"—which he accordingly did, and we departed in a cab for our first search after economy at Southend-on-Sea.

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## CHAPTER II.

IN the cab, going to the station, we had a slight fight. Being brimful of cheap living ideas, I remarked authoritatively—

"Of course we will go third class."

At times Jack wore an eye-glass ; it was perfectly useless to him, and nothing annoyed me more, than when he turned it on me.

"Don't stare, Jack ! Didn't you hear me speaking to you ?"

"Where did you get that frock ?" said Jack, who apparently had not heard.

"My gown ? It's blue serge, of course it came from Redfern."

"And it's paid for," said Jack. "And so are these togs ; though I'd be ashamed to look my tailor in the face, and think I hadn't a bill with him. Still, as matters are, and we are not likely to pay those sort of bills out of a hundred pounds a year, we will go first class, and keep clean."

I was not pleased, as I was feeling in a very self-sacrificing mood, the only effect of which was, that Jack bought me the "Pictorial" and "Temple Bar" to read going down, and retired int a smoking carriage himself.

Arrived at Southend, we demanded of a porter where we should find rooms.

"Wal," he said, "there is just three divisions in this 'ere town ; near the sea, where the tip-tops goes ; there is the middle, which is town, and commercials likes; and then there's these here small houses for the poor class, and trippers."

"Perhaps we had better try them," said Jack to me, with an evident effort, turning to go, but not before I heard the porter say,

"Blest, if that aint the meanest swell as ever I seed. I'd have thought a cove like he would have treated his gal to a 'otel anyhow."

"One would think so," said another, "for he comed first class, and his luggage is tip-top."

"Let's try these," said Jack sarcastically, pointing to a pork-butcher's, over which hung a card with "Apartments" on it.

"What !" said I, "and hear the poor pigs screaming all day ! O ! Jack, how could you," tearfully.

"Dear child, do you suppose they keep the pigs on the premises, and cut out little bits at a time to make sausages ? Never mind, we won't go in there, as you don't like it, let's try these over the grocer's shop."

"Oh ! no, we could not go there, it would smell of cheese, oil, and things. Let us find a quiet street, where there are no shops."

And so we did ; in a few minutes we found a very quiet street,

not to say dull. Every house was grey, and had a little bay-window, and every window was draped with imitation lace curtains, and hung with a card—"Apartments."

"This is much better," I remarked, with hope.

"We will see," said Jack, pressing his thumb on a tiny electric bell. We waited, but though Jack's thumb was of the giant's order, he was quite unable to make that latest improvement ring.

"We will try another," said he, after some moments. "Luckily there are plenty in this street to be had."

We went to another and knocked, with a green knocker.

"Wet paint, by Jove!" cried Jack, holding up his deer-skin glove ruefully for me to look at. "There goes seven and six. Oh, Economy! thou art a fickle Goddess."

"I am sure "Economy" was not a woman!" I remarked as we turned away from that door, having been informed that the "parties hin are not leaving for a few days." "The parties" evidently liked wet paint.

Well we tried three or four more houses in the same street, but without success.

"I tell you what it is, little woman," as I shudderingly withdrew him from an awful apparition in smuts, and other dirt. "I am very hungry, and as for you, you look quite washed-out." I protested faintly; but I was hungry, tired, and very disappointed, besides, I had been married ten years, and knew well that the superior animal must be fed, so we went off in search of an hotel. "First-class restaurant at the 'Royal' sir," said a cabman, in answer to Jack's question.

"Yes, it is a goodish step for the lady." And after less than three minutes drive, the wretch landed us at a nice looking hotel, fronting a sloping garden, and long narrow pier, that stretched out like a thin arm into what might be called by courtesy, a sea.

"What have you got to eat, waiter?" said Jack, sitting down with a sigh of satisfaction, in the comfortable private room we were shown into.

"Well, sir," answered the waiter, with what would have been a shrug had he been a Frenchman, "there's not much ready this time of the year. We don't get many, except Saturday to Monday. There is some mutton, but it was served an hour ago, and is getting cold. I don't think it would suit you," in a deferential voice, with

an eye to tips. "If you could wait, and I might suggest, we soon could get you a nice spring chicken, with French beans and a gooseberry tart to follow, and you might take your lady to look at the pier, it's worth looking at, and we will be quite ready in three quarters of an hour," he added, with fatherly kindness.

"Very well," said Jack, "get it ready as soon as you can."

The sun, though it was not visible in the other part of the town, was shining brightly here, and the water looked cool and blue, as we strolled along the cliff, lazily watching fat babies toddling about, and bicycling girls, in more or less stages of inaptitude, struggling against the east wind, that always blows on that coast. But we were very silent, Jack was hungry, and I knew better than to talk, though I was filled with misgivings as to the probable cost of our coming lunch.

We enjoyed it, however, and found everything excellent, including the bottle of Beaune, against which I dared not protest. I was particularly struck with the ostentatious manner in which the waiter announced his arrival by loud knocking at the door.

"I wonder why he does it?" I asked Jack, who was eating Tangerines we had not ordered, at the end of our lunch.

"Don't you know?" said Jack, looking at me whimsically. "He takes us for bride and bridegroom."

"Oh! Jack, how absurd, after ten years." But I felt myself getting a little red.

"Well, I don't know," said my husband, "go and look in that glass, and I don't think you will consider him so ridiculous after all."

Laughing, I went. I will tell you what I saw. It is not modish any longer to describe people in stories, but as I am but writing truth, that does not form a precedent for me.

Reflected was a slim figure, about five feet six, a charming tailor-suit of blue serge, with all necessary etceteras, including a cunning toque, with little bunches of violets resting on shining brown-gold hair, a nice little pale face, with large, sad grey eyes, a mouth, not a bit like a rose-bud, and really, I must say it—a perfect nose, five and twenty I would give the reflected figure, though I knew I was thirty—*scennée*, but I had been dressed that morning by a Parisian maid. How would I look to-morrow? Anyway, my appearance would always be that of an aristocrat. (Two short hours after that illusion was rudely dispelled).

I turned and looked at Jack. Oh, there was no doubt about him, so tall, so grandly, cleanly English-looking. Dear old fellow! he looked ready for anything—capable of doing anything—and yet, at thirty-nine, he was going to sink into the oblivion of cheap lodgings and sordid surroundings. Why, why had he left the army? And why, having left it, is it so nearly impossible for a man to do anything ever after but lose money.

"Well, Dickie; not satisfied with what you see?"

"Oh, yes, Jack," I replied, modestly, "I think we are a very good looking couple, but——"

"But me no buts! We have had an excellent lunch, and I'm smoking a not bad cigar. Come and talk, and let us be happy for a bit. I was just thinking of that night I saw you first, in all your war paint, at Lady Craven's. How I puzzled my head where I had seen you before, and then suddenly remembered you were the little girl with the hair, who used to fly after the Ballymore hounds."

"Oh, I am not likely to forget! And Cousin Ella (Mrs. Partan, you know) was so shocked; she thought you were asking me to dance without an introduction. But I knew you again, Jack, without puzzling my head."

Then we did have a nice talk about the dear old times and the golden days, that somehow I had never properly valued till they were gone, and for one happy hour I forgot "Apartments," and even the horrid bill that was waiting us. And then—then the waiter knocked even more loudly than before, and brought it in. No, I am not going to tell you how much it came to now, you will find it in the accounts of our first week's expenses.

"Now to business," said Jack, handing me my ebony crutch stick while the fatherly waiter smirked and beamed after what I considered much too large a "tip." "I suppose there are plenty of rooms to be had about here, waiter?"

"Plenty, sir, in front of the sea, at this time of the year, sir. Shall I send the porter to show you?" obligingly.

But I hastily assured him I would find some for myself.

Turning a little to the right, into a crescent of houses, not quite so ambitious as the sea-front, we rang at one that struck me as being particularly clean and bright. I remember Mrs. Kendal once ordering a play that was to have the "scent of the hay-field" thrown in. The young girl who opened the door brought with her delightful thoughts of

roses, cream and all country freshness. She showed us the rooms, in a delightfully innocent and charming manner. They were fairly well furnished and spotlessly clean. She told us that her "auntie" was out, but at this time of the year we could have the rooms at one pound a week, adding, to my great satisfaction, that she did the service.

Everything being apparently settled, Jack went to the station for the luggage, and I remained in the drawing-room, already bent on making the furniture assume a more artistic aspect, and in my mind's eye arranging the various photographs, cushions, and bits of brocade I had taken care to bring down from town with me, much against Jack's will. Suddenly, as I was in the middle of moving the inevitable gilt clock from the mantle-piece, into my presence stalked a tall, gaunt female.

"What are you doing, pulling about my furniture?" she demanded in tones that were shrill and high.

So astonished was I at her sudden appearance, that I nearly let the clock fall on my toes, but with a sudden movement she roughly seized it in her claw-like hands, placing it on the table with a bang that certainly could not improve its works.

"I want to know," she continued, still more excitedly, "what you were touching that clock for?"

By this time I recovered myself a little, and not being accustomed to be trodden on, I calmly demanded by what right she came into the room that had just been let to me.

"That has just been let to you, indeed!" she screamed. "I'll soon show you whether it has been let to you or not. How do I know but what you was a-trying to make off with that clock. People, as calls themselves ladies, don't go a-touching other people's property before their luggage is here. Anyone can see the sort you are."

Just at that moment, to my infinite delight, I heard a cab stopping at the door, and in another moment, Jack was in the room, looking in the greatest astonishment from one to the other of us.

"What *is* the matter, Gwendoline?" he said.

"Oh, Jack! this dreadful woman is so insulting."

"Which I am nothing of the kind, sir," a little over-awed, I think, by Jack's appearance. "But when I comes into the room to see if I shall accept the lodgers that my niece has brought in, and I finds this person a-doing something with my clock——"

"What do you mean, woman? And how dare you call my wife a person?" cries quickly-roused Jack.

"Which we all are," retorts the landlady, with a certain amount of logic. "But what I wants is this—fair and square—(she had looked out of the window and seen the luggage) is, that you pays in advance and gives me references. I am a well-known, 'onest widder woman, of number three, Pelham Crescent, which, if peculiar people wants to take her rooms, says, pay in advance and give references."

"I shall do neither the one or the other," cries Jack, furiously. "Having now seen you, I would not stay in your house for a thousand pounds! Come, Gwendoline, put on your hat," impatiently.

"Pore young man," said the landlady, more viciously than ever, seeing that we were about to depart, "you are very flush with your thousand pounds, and maybe your lady (with great sarcasm) will make it fly for you. Them yellow-haired Monday to Thursdays is dangerous, more especially when taken by the week."

She was continuing in the same strain, but we heard no more, for Jack had bundled me into the still waiting cab, and the last I saw of three, Pelham Crescent, was the little roses and cream maiden watching us from an upper window with a smile. Could it be of malice? I don't know. I believe in nothing.

\*       \*       \*       \*

A clever French actor, who plays at the "Tzar Theatre," at St. Petersburgh, said to me while talking of our national characteristics that he had come to the conclusion that English people must be the most greedy on earth, and that he based his opinion on the fact that nothing was so talked of in English novels as eating. At the time I thought that rather a nasty one, but on reflection, I consider it complimentary, as showing a truer realism than Zola's, though not of so nasty a kind. I therefore do not apologise for stating that the moment we were in the cab, Jack turned to me, saying:

"Don't speak at all now, little woman; keep quiet until after you have had your tea."

In a few minutes I was again installed in the private sitting-room where we had lunched, Jack leaving me to relieve his feelings by taking a walk. After being refreshed by the universal panacea for female woes, I went to my room, or rather to the bedroom Jack had ordered for me—naturally the best in the house—and indulged myself with a good sleep. I should have liked to have undone my hair, it

felt so heavy and my head ached so, but I dared not do that—never would I be able to get it up in the same way again. I felt much better on waking, and sent for the trunk, entitled by Felici *Petit panier de nécessités de voyage*. In it I found ready a black chiffon accordion blouse, with short canvas skirt, Empire belt, faintly embroidered with Parma violets, stockings to match, and plain black satin shoes. Even the two little diamond brooches and violet silk petticoat not forgotten. I can recommend anyone—without being a ladies' column—to always have a "necessity basket," or "first-nighter," as Jack calls it, particularly if they have a Felici to pack it. Had it been for a country house instead of an hotel, its contents would have been radically different—smart tea-gown, dinner-gown, diamonds, etc., etc. (you are much more likely not to be robbed of your diamonds hidden away in a trunk than in a bag or dressing-case, which "jumps" its contents to every eye).

We had a bottle of "Heidsieck" at dinner; Jack said it was necessary after what we had gone through, "and was part-payment of experience." Later on I sat alone in my bedroom, before a bright fire, feeling as depressed as champagne generally leaves one. Over and over again I saw the vision of that awful landlady, who had taken me for a naughty woman. I saw her great, gaunt figure, piercing eyes, her respectably greasy black gown and shawl, her spectacles, and her horrid claw-like hands.

After all, wasn't I a little like a cocotte (except, of course, in one thing). They were smart to their toes, so was I; they smoked, so did I; their photos were sold, so probably were mine; they had yellow hair, so had I—that woman said. I felt very wretched. Jack came in, and rising from the big arm-chair, in my night-gown, I stood before him with all the obnoxious tresses floating wildly about me (I had at last summoned courage to undo it).

"Oh! Jack, do I look like an aurorucomus person?"

"What nonsense!"

"But you know she said—she said——"

"Oh! let her say her prayers, as if I'd have married an auri-something girl! I like you with your hair like that."

It hurt when I tried to plait it. He took up a curl and kissed it, then he locked the door.

## CHAPTER III.

JACK went off early next morning, with the porter of the hotel, to look for lodgings, but I was left behind, grilling over the mysteries of my toilet.

I remember a story my uncle has told me, about the sister of the Duchess of St. Alban's, when she was engaged to be married, and her father, the late Bernal Osborn, not approving of the marriage (which, however, afterwards turned out splendidly), pointed out, amongst other disagreeables, that she would have to do without a maid.

"What will you do with your hair?" he asked.

She made him no reply at the time, but on her wedding-morning appeared at breakfast like a handsome boy, her head covered with short black curls. Everybody expressed surprise and consternation at seeing her shorn of her beautiful hair.

"That is how I shall manage without a maid," said the bride, turning to her father, and giving him the benefit of one flash from her magnificent eyes.

I would like to have imitated Miss Osborn's pluck, but, as I said before, I am only a poor thing. I therefore got downstairs with a very wobbly "tea-pot handle" (made of hair) decorating the back of my head, and innumerable hair-pins running into it, just in time to receive Jack returning jubilant from his quest, having secured rooms at twenty-five shillings per week, which, the porter having taken them with a flourish of trumpets, for "Major and Lady Gwendoline Reegan," we considered cheap. Jack confessed to me his had been the better part—he waited outside while the porter catered for our wants. So like a man!

"There is one thing I must impress upon you," said my lord and master, with a manner dictatorial, "you must not touch the furniture, nor must you put your own lumber about the place. What does it matter? It will be good enough for us," coming off his high horse with a sigh.

Privately, I did not find it "good enough" at all. First it was the wrong side of the road—I love the sun;—secondly, the landlady seemed only one degree less appalling than the other; thirdly, the drawing-room was so well supplied with musical instruments, you could not walk across the room without something squeaking, and

if you opened the window, and were possessed of a strong fancy, you might think yourself at the "Alté Schloss," at Baden-Baden, amidst the Æolian harps. It was a long, low room, very narrow, very dark and very musty. A grand piano, of ancient design, stood at the top of it, near it a harp, minus many strings, a spinet guarded, a round deal table, but sparsely draped with a red table-cloth, a huge 'cello standing on the other side. Throw in a few chairs, the Queen's picture and that of her Consort, a heavily-curtained, unopened window, a dying fern in a green pot, two large volumes of the "Fireside at Home," and you have the room. I don't like to mention the gilt clock. I am susceptible about it. But, of course, it was there!

\* \* \* \* \*

Six days have elapsed since I was first introduced to the musical sitting-room. I have learnt a few things. One is to fix my hair in such a manner that it looks less likely to fall into a shoulder cape; another is, to realise that my landlady is not my cook, but a respectable "ouseholder," whilst I am but a waif and a stray. She is a short, rosy person, swathed in the most lugubrious crape garments.

Her husband, she tells me, "kep' her like a lady." He was the possessor of a musical instrument shop—hence the dining-room furniture. She indulged herself in so many details regarding his death and burial, while taking the multitudinary orders, that I am certain that she was a person who revelled in funerals almost as much as she did in "kitchen condiments." They were one of the experiences I learnt during that week.

Here are the promised accounts. I am afraid we did not keep them very well.

Cab, porter, papers and train to South-

end	...	...	...	£1	0	0
Lunch	...	...	...	0	14	6
Cabs	...	...	...	0	5	0
" Tip " to waiter	...	...	...	0	2	6

Hotel bill for night, including breakfast

and dinner	...	...	...	2	2	0
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*Lodging House—*

Butcher's bill for week	...	...	0	15	9	
Fishmonger and poult erer	...	...	0	12	6	
Baker	...	...	0	3	4½	

Grocer, including wine and spirits	...	1	12	2
Apartments	...	1	5	0
Kitchen condiments	...	0	3	6
Cruets	...	0	2	6
Coals	...	0	5	0
Kitchen fire	...	0	3	6
Boot cleaning	...	0	1	0
Gas	...	0	3	0
Washing of linen	...	0	3	0
				<hr/>
		£	9	14 3½

And we wanted to live on two pounds a week!

Jack swore a big, big D. But we hoped next week would be better. And the days went on.

For amusement, my spouse took long walks, which were distinctly expensive, as it made him very hungry, and I pottered about in the streets or on the green. Oh, the dullness of it! Soon I got to know every fat baby, every fond mother, and careless nurse-maid by sight. I could have passed a competitive examination in the various defects and merits of the cyclists. It was just the same with the shops. I knew that hat with the nodding plumes and daisies, marked "Direct from Paris;" I knew that grass lawn blouse, "very stylish," in the corner-shop window; I knew—— But why should I bother you with my knowledge. You don't want to be bored like I was.

Nothing happens but the unexpected; and yet the unexpected is always a surprise. This time it came in the form of what my nephew Watty would call a "high old row" between Jack and myself. The row was caused by a letter. The letter was written by Mrs. Barton, my cousin and ex-chaperon.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Now I must give you a little explanation, but I hope I won't be long travelling backwards. No one likes it. I invariably skip it in a book, unless I am really interested in the heroine.

Undoubtedly the new style has merits, beside that of being very easy. "The marriage took place in St. George's Church, and was altogether a smart function."

I saw her a few days after the funeral, she looked sad-eyed and wan, her extreme personality had been too much for him.

My Uncle Archibald and my father were brothers, and some thirty-two years ago, already looked upon by the county as old bachelors; they always lived at "Donydeen," the family estate, which, even in those days, was not remarkable for its wealth. They were perfectly inseparable, and devoted to each other.

My uncle had been in the army, and won considerable distinction in the Crimea and Indian Mutiny, where he lost a leg at the Battle of Gwalior, which obliged him to retire, and rendered him unfit for riding, to his own great regret. But he was still a keen sportsman, and could walk for hours after snipe, through bog-lands, with his faithful retriever at his heels. No battue shooting for him!

About this time, a late brother officer of his arrived at the adjacent town, with his wife and daughter.

The two old comrades met with delight, and it required very little persuasion to induce Major Barton and his family to pay a *long* visit to "Donydeen."

Major Barton, to use a national idiom, was an Englishman of Irish abstraction, and at that time was touring through the "ould country," hoping to benefit his wife's health, which had been sadly shattered by her long residence in India.

She had not been a fortnight at "Donydeen," when she died, to everybody's great surprise. Of course excuses were made for death, they always are. She caught cold or something.

My father had her buried with great pomp and ceremony in our little churchyard, close to our family vault. Many a time have I played behind the big white angel that guards her last resting place. And Major Barton and his daughter remained on *sine die*.

I don't think matrimony would have ever entered into my father's head, had not the major, after a stay of seven months, one day announced his intention of returning to England.

"But surely you will not take Gwendoline? You will leave her with us?" cried my father and uncle, both simultaneously.

"My dear Gaunt, my dear Verscoyle, don't you see that it's impossible."

"I don't know how we are to get on without her," said Gaunt, gloomily.

That night, long after the major had retired, the two brothers pondered over the question.

"She makes the sunlight of the house," said Uncle Archie.

"She is just one bit of brightness," said my father.

"She killed a rabbit, the other day, while I held the gun over her shoulder," said Archie admiringly.

"She rode that mare, 'Ziela,' down the avenue superbly; to be sure she is as quiet as a sheep," chimed in my father.

"And we can't do without her," they both agreed.

"I tell you what it is," said Archie, after a good long silence, much whiskey and tobacco, "we must marry her!"

"We can't both marry her!" said my father, reluctantly, by no means jumping at the brilliant suggestion. "Which of us is to become a Benedict?"

"Of course it must be you," replied Archie, with conviction. "You are the head of the family. And now I think of it, it is absolutely your duty to marry."

"It has taken you some time to think of it, as I am turned fifty," retorted my father, rather drily. "Perhaps she won't have me!" he added, brightening. "I am old for a girl that can't be more than twenty."

"Gwen is twenty-five, she told me so herself," said Archie.

"Is she, now?" said my father, in much surprise. "You don't think," lowering his voice, as if the walls had ears, "that Barton is playing up to it, eh?"

Lord Gaunt, in his day, had been a very handsome man, and much run after by the fair sex; he knew a thing or two.

"Gaunt!" exclaimed my uncle, with righteous indignation. "To accuse a man in my own regiment of such a thing."

"Oh! well, there," apologised my father, "I'll speak to Gwen in the morning, and if she will take me, why, I'll marry her!" with the air of a martyr.

She did take him. And the major gave them his blessing and his society for about three years, after which he joined the great majority.

I think of all concerned, the person who got the most satisfaction out of that marriage, was Major Barton; it pleased him all round. As father of Lady Gaunt, he assumed a *locus standi* in a place which suited him. He became a member of the local club, and also of Kildare Street. He felt happier and wealthier than he had done for years. Now he could spend all his income (it was far from colossal) on him-

self and his pleasures; unfettered by wife or child. My Uncle Archie was at first well content, but somehow (he never could quite tell how) the "brightness," and the "sunshine" faded quickly, and Lady Gaunt was a very different person to "Gwen," whom both brothers had looked upon as the "light of Donydeen."

The rabbit my uncle shot over her shoulder was the last, and my father's hope to make her a first-rate horsewoman was certainly never fulfilled.

After his marriage, another hope came to him, and he grew feverishly anxious for an heir. My birth was, therefore, a great disappointment. As for my mother, she tired rapidly of country life. A beautiful girl, accustomed to the flattery and adulation freely accorded to her during her garrison life, to be tied down to the very few and far between gaieties of a narrow county society.

Married to a man double her age, who though fond and kind to her, was no more in love with her than she was with him. A woman of but little intellect, and that little entirely of the "accomplishment" sort, it was not wonderful that she soon began to fade and pine, till, to use my uncle's own words: "Sure, there was nothing left of her but her own ghost, which was just walking about to save its funeral expenses."

My poor mother! Sometimes I think, without intending it, that my uncle's judgement of her was harsh. I have never seen either picture or photograph of her, still, in fancy, I have a sort of remembrance of her. A kind of idealized embodiment of myself, paler, fairer, and more shadowy. She died when I was five years old, and even now I can't help feeling that she is suffocating in the family vault.

I would like to take her and lay her with her mother, under the earth, where the snowdrops grow in Spring, and the White Angel would guard her always.

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## CHAPTER V.

I BECAME a great pet with my father and uncle, they undertook my education, which was perhaps peculiar. In the library there was a quaint old book, entitled "The Cries of London." These I learnt with far greater facility, than I did spelling. Indeed, so proficient

did I become, and so early in the morning did I practice, that I think my tutors almost regretted that accomplishment.

My father took me out hunting from the time I was six years old, and I was my uncle's companion in his long shooting expeditions. I could, and can still, climb a tree better than most boys.

When I was about fourteen, I first saw Jack. Even then I thought what a good-looking fellow he was. He and his brother, Sir Richard Reegan, were staying at a country house near. Sir Richard, even then a widower, had with him his little son, a poor, delicate child, who I was rather indignant at having consigned to me as a playmate.

Out of that acquaintance came the end of my happy country life. Sir Richard (worse luck) mentioned me casually one day to Mrs. Barton—a lady who loved, and loves still to put her finger into every one's pie. She remembered—much too distinctly—that her father-in-law's brother's daughter (this is not a riddle) was my mother. She was great (when it suited her) at duties and relationships, and to cut a long story short, she swooped down on "Donydeen," to make her little cousin's acquaintance.

It did not take her long to declare that I was growing up nothing but a ragamuffin; wanting in all the graces and airs necessary to a young lady, and she drew so horrible a picture of my future state, that she persuaded my father, without much difficulty, to pack me off to a school in Paris. I always think she had an interest in that school, but perhaps I wrong her.

I got on extremely well in Paris, in spite of my peculiar education. Like all Irish girls, I picked up French with great rapidity. Dancing I adored, and in music and singing I held my own. "The gay Parisienne" who taught our young ideas how to shoot, by no means went in for the higher education of women. I mention this as an apology for the frivolity you have doubtless noticed in me.

My father and uncle came over for two of my vacations, instead of my returning home. For the Christmas one we remained in Paris, and did we not enjoy ourselves! To every sight and every theatre, I dragged them both. We had splendid dinners at the "Continental," and suppers at "Bignon's," rides in the Bois, where we laughed to scorn the "foreigners," as we calmly call them in their own city—and best of all, long, quiet mornings in the Louvre, where we looked at the pictures, but thought and talked about home,

and all the wonderful things we would do when I returned "for good" a grown up girl.

In the summer we went to Trouville, which was still "fearful and wonderful" in those days, though shorn of the glory of the second Empire. I never was tired at laughing at the bathers, fat and happy, bobbing up and down, with their families, in about two inches of water, the sun flashing upon the elaborate costumes of the elders, and on the little naked boys and girls, ugly little wretches they were. De Morny's Palace had a fascination for me, his strange life and his horrible death.

My father, who had known Trouville well under the Empire, told me many anecdotes of the beautiful Empress and her ladies. But I must say, that I thought, and still think, Trouville a very ugly, flat, sandy waste, and can't imagine why it ever gained so much popularity.

About this time, Irish affairs began to go from bad to worse. As my father said : " Money was very tight," and I know now, though I did not then (for they told me very little), how those two pinched and screwed to keep me at my expensive French school. Hunters were sold, trees cut, and rigid economy became the order of the day.

I had been at school about two years, when the most dreadful thing that could take place happened. I shudder now to think of it, and cannot dwell on it in detail.

As my uncle was returning one November afternoon, his gun over his shoulder, a blinding rain in his eyes, in the uncertain grey twilight, his wooden leg caught in a hole, and he stumbled. At the same moment, as he afterwards explained, a giant horse appeared to spring on him out of the bog, and a voice, that he declares was not my father's, shouted his name. Whether his gun went off, in his efforts not to be trampled upon, or that he took aim at what he fully believed to be a phantom, none will ever know, certain it is, that my father was picked up at six o'clock in the evening, by some of the household, who were wildly alarmed, his horse having galloped home riderless some two hours before. He was quite dead, shot through the heart, my uncle not very far from him, but it was only by accident they saw him, for he was almost buried in the bog, which was fast sucking him downwards. He was quite unconscious. And when after many hours, he came to himself, he knew nothing

of the tragedy that had taken place. Of course there was an inquest, and what light he could throw on the occurrence he did.

His heart was fairly broken, and he altered beyond description. This from hearsay, for I have never seen him or "Donydeen" again—he could not bear it. The estate was strictly entailed in the male line, and there he has remained alone in his poverty and wretchedness.

He managed to keep me at school for some time longer; I was then handed over to Mrs. Barton to be brought out in London society, and in about two years afterwards, as you know, Jack and I were married. Jack's brother was much opposed to our marriage; of course he was unable to interfere, but what he could say against it he did, and that with great vigour; he considered his handsome brother quite thrown away on an almost penniless Irish girl. Mrs. Barton was also much disappointed, as she had entertained hopes for me, in what she was pleased to consider a "higher direction."

"My dear," she said, "to flirt with Major Reegan is perfect, to marry is quite the reverse."

How wrong she was!—but evidently she has not changed her mind after ten years.

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## Old Easter Customs.

By DARLEY DALE.

EASTER has never been so popular a festival in this country since the Reformation as Christmas, so perhaps on this account Easter customs are comparatively few, and of these the only one that we still retain is that of Easter-eggs.

"Lifting," "hocking," "the dancing of the sun," and "clipping the church," are now as obsolete as tansy-puddings and stool-ball, with which at the beginning of the century our ancestors regaled and amused themselves at Easter-tide.

The giving of Easter-eggs at Easter-time is a very old custom; they used to be called *pasch* or *pace* eggs; and at the beginning of this century some primitive methods of adorning ordinary eggs were

still adopted. The eggs were first warmed in hot water, and then with the end of a tallow candle the name of the person for whom they were intended, or some legend, or some device was inscribed upon them ; the eggs were then boiled in cochineal or some other dye then known, for there were no aniline dyes in those days, no Judson's dyes, no Maypole soaps, and when cold the greased portion of course remained white.

If intended for a love-token, the device was something applicable to the occasion ; a flaming torch, or a heart, a bow and quiverful of arrows, or a true lover's knot. Sometimes, if the artist were skilful, a cupid, or flowers or a landscape was scraped on the dyed egg with a penknife instead of drawing the device in the tallow beforehand. Some eggs were simply dyed various colours with no design, some were spotted or striped with tallow, but to be boiled hard, the harder the better was a *sine quâ non* with Easter eggs. Boys played with them very much as they now-a-days play with horse-chestnuts, fighting with them, the broken egg falling to the share of the victor. In Catholic times the Easter-eggs were blessed by the priest, the head of the family sent a basketful of cooked and dyed eggs to the church on Easter ève, to be blessed, a ceremony still performed in Catholic countries, where the custom of Easter-eggs is still observed.

In Ireland in olden times, it was commonly believed that the sun danced on Easter-day, in honour of the Resurrection, and it was customary to rise at four o'clock to witness it. This idea also prevailed in some parts of England, where it was called "lamb playing," and the people rose early, and knelt by some river or piece of clear water to watch the performance on Easter-morn. Mr. Brand, in his "Popular Antiquities," quotes a stanza from an old ballad alluding to this belief—

" But Dick she dances such a way !  
No sun upon an Easter-day  
Is half so fine a sight."

And Hone, in his "Everyday Book," solemnly assures his readers that on any day in the year the same phenomenon might be witnessed with the aid of a piece of smoked glass.

A strange old local custom, prevalent early in the century, at Birmingham, is also mentioned in one of Hone's "Everyday Books;" it was called "clipping the church." It consisted in the school

children assembling outside the church on Easter Monday ; as they arrived they stationed themselves with their backs against the outside walls of the church, and joined hands until the chain was completed, and the entire building surrounded with a girdle of children, who then separated and went in procession to the only other church Birmingham then possessed and repeated the process. The origin and object of this custom are veiled in obscurity, but it appears to have been confined to that locality.

A more widely spread and a more ancient custom was that of "heaving" or "lifting;" it was also a more boisterous performance. It prevailed in Warwickshire, Lancashire and Staffordshire, and in other parts of England, and took place between the hours of nine and twelve on Easter Monday and Easter Tuesday ; on Easter Monday the men heaved the women, on Easter Tuesday the women heaved the men, and the latter day appears to have afforded the most amusement.

The man who was "lifted" or "heaved" had to give the heavers, generally eight or nine, a tip, and in return was rewarded with a kiss from each of the fair damsels or comely matrons who had "heaved" him, while the woman who was "heaved" had to submit to be kissed by her "heavers."

Different methods of "heaving" prevailed in various places, but it was considered necessary to "lift" the person three times wherever it was done. It appears to have been practised in all ranks of life ; the female servants of large houses "heaved" their masters, and there is a tradition that Edward I. was "heaved" in his bed one Easter. Sometimes a chair was used to "heave" the victim, and when this was done in the upper classes, the chair was decorated with white ribbons. In some places the person "heaved" was placed in a horizontal position, but in the house a chair was generally used ; sometimes out of doors a chair was extemporised by the "heavers" with their hands. Perhaps the arm-chair which children make by grasping each other's wrists cross-wise, may be a relic of the custom of "lifting."

This custom is supposed to be a rude travesty of some of the religious ceremonies of the Catholic church at Easter-tide.

The happily obsolete custom of eating tansy-pudding at Easter was formerly observed in memory of the bitter herbs with which the Jews dressed the paschal lamb at their Passover : an allusion to

tansy-pudding and stool-ball occurs in the following verse quoted in Brand's "Popular Antiquities"—

"At stool-ball Lucia let us play  
For sugar, cakes, or wine;  
Or for a tansy let us pay,  
The toss be thine or mine.'

Easter was the time for ball-play, stool-ball and trap-bat-and-ball, all of which were very popular amusements, and the forerunners of cricket; there were clubs for ball-play in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and at Easter the season opened. The mayor, aldermen, and burgesses went out in procession to inaugurate the ball-play on Easter Monday.

Trap-bat-and-ball was an amusement in which old women took part on Shrove Tuesday, at Easter and at Whitsuntide in the Eastern counties.

In London Easter Monday and Tuesday were the greatest holidays in the year; Greenwich fair was celebrated on these days, and as now on Derby-day the great sight is the road, so then it was not the fair itself but the crowds who went to it that formed its great attraction. It was eminently a democratic festival; all sorts and conditions of men went to it, in all sorts and kinds of vehicles. Roughs and pickpockets were a conspicuous element on all the roads that led to Greenwich, and the conveyances appear to have been of a very rough and ready order.

"Hocking" did not take place actually at Easter, but a fortnight after; the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter Monday and Tuesday were called Hock-tide. Hock Monday was the men's day for "hocking," Hock Tuesday was the greater day though, and then the women were the hockers.

On these days it was the custom for men and women to stop foot-passengers by means of ropes and extort a donation from them, to be devoted to some charitable purpose; this was called "hocking."

Antiquaries differ as to the origin of this custom; some think it was originally instituted to commemorate the massacre of the Danes in this country in the reign of Ethelred; others think it was of later date, and was intended to commemorate the overthrow of the Danish power by the death of Hardicanute. However this may be, it is difficult to see what connection it had with Easter, and perhaps Easter merely regulated the time for it

## The Deserter.

By C. M. E. WHITE.

Author of "THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER," "THE ROMANCE OF A BRETON FORT."

### I.

LÉONIE was sad—though this might seem sufficiently astonishing. She was experiencing *un succès fou* at the most brilliant ball of the season given by—strange contrast—some distinguished Americans in a historic French château.

The girl was a vision of loveliness, in a white gown which was beyond criticism; she was admittedly one of the loveliest among a distinctly cosmopolitan crowd. Nevertheless, as she stood there, apparently smiling and gay, surrounded by her little court, a shadow clouded her blue eyes, and something seemed to tighten round her heart. Already she felt the one bitter drop which spoils almost every cup of happiness. "Is it possible that he is not coming," she murmured to herself, "when he knows I go to-morrow?" Her proud little head drooped a moment, then she swept a glance over the splendid old room, full of brilliant, bewildering light and colour, and her eyes sought the doorway.

Suddenly, through the sound of gay talk and rippling laughter, she heard a voice at her elbow. It was only someone asking for the next dance, but there was a ring in the tone, and a look in the dark eyes which rested on hers, that explained volumes.

The speaker was a young man, very young still, not more than twenty-one, but Léon de Goncourt was already celebrated in Paris for his good looks, his dancing, and a certain dare-devil recklessness.

"Shall we dance?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, simply, but a faint blush dyed her cheeks, and her eyes shone.

One of Strauss's valses rang out in a wild, sweet melody, and they glided down the room.

"Who is that?" asked one Frenchman of another, "She is *admirablement belle*; and how divinely she dances."

"That," answered the other, "is Mademoiselle Léonie de Goncourt, a French Canadian, originally, but now become American, and Protestant, more's the pity. She is an heiress, and altogether the rage—odd coincidence, eh?" added the speaker, with a laugh.

The valse was dying away in a dreamy sigh, almost a wail of violins.

"Come," he entreated, and they went out into the balmy night together.

The ballroom led on to a wide terrace brilliantly illuminated. Beyond, lay the gardens, also lighted up with coloured lanterns, which gave a fairy-like effect. Soft voices, with here and there the echo of laughter, came up from hidden alleys below. Round the angle of the château was another terrace, and here, into the cool darkness, De Goncourt led his partner.

They found two seats in a quiet corner, where the hum of voices hardly reached. A tangle of late roses shed their fading sweetness and close by a great magnolia sent forth its rich heavy odour.

A long silence followed. The girl sat quite still, looking out into the starry distance—not a breath of wind disturbed the almost sultry heat of the night.

"Léonie," he said, at last, and both hearts began to beat fast, "do you not know, cannot you guess, what I want to say? Look at me, my sweet, and listen to me kindly, I beseech you." He seized her hand impetuously, almost roughly, and bending down, covered it with passionate kisses.

Then he told her the history of his love, his first *grande passion*—how he had loved her from the first, ever since their first meeting, but he had lacked the courage to tell her—and Léonie listened glad at heart.

"So," she said, at last, when their talk became more rational. "You say we are almost relations, as well as being of the same name; although the two branches of the family have been separated so long? How strange it all seems; and oh, Léon, how ridiculously young you are, dear! Do you know I am two years older than you?"

"Oh, my beautiful cousin, my dearest one," the young man answered, passionately. "You may be any age you like, to me you will never grow old, Do you really guess how I adore you? How can I let you go?"

"But you will come with us to America?" said the girl, softly.

"Oh, Léonie, don't you know every Frenchman has to be a soldier? In a few days time I must join my regiment. No De Goncourt has ever shirked his duty—only just now duty is terribly hard."

They went back to the ballroom, where several curious eyes followed them.

"I call it real unfair," said a keen faced American. "Just look at that girl! one of the prettiest in Boston city."

"Don't trouble yourself," said his friend; "I guess that won't be a match. His family are Roman Catholics, and would not hear of it."

Suddenly Léonie gave a start, as a man passed them in the crowd. "Léon, who is that? He is the image of you."

"Don't look so startled, sweetheart; it is only my cousin, Raoul de Goncourt—he is rather like me."

The girl half shivered. "It is curious, but I wish I had not seen him. Such a likeness is almost uncanny." However, she could not explain herself any further.

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"As to his being a soldier, it shall not be," she murmured vehemently to herself, as she walked restlessly up and down her room.

The ball was over, the tired guests had dispersed; a death-like stillness lay over the old château, broken only by the soft *frou frou* of the girl's gown on the bare boards.

The touch of her lover's hand, and the sound of his voice still lingered with her, and her heart was full of a strange unrest. She leaned out of her window at last and watched the dawn break. The grey light made her fair face look almost wan, but a smile parted her lips. "All is fair in love and war," she mused, "I hope my little scheme will succeed."

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Next day found them at Havre, and they stood together on the deck of the American liner, waiting for Léonie's mother, who was to join her daughter. In the hurry and bustle of the meeting, followed by adieux in a distant part of the ship, De Goncourt missed the warning bell—the tender went back to Havre, and the liner had started before he found himself a prisoner.

Perhaps he was not unwilling, and now the Rubicon was passed, he resigned himself to his fate.

Three weeks later they were married.

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## II.

"Hear the sledges with their bells, silver bells,  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells;  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, in the icy air of night,  
While the stars that over-sprinkled all the heavens seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight."

THE city of Boston was seized in the grip of an iron winter.

The poor suffered in silence, and the rich took what pleasure they could in skating and sleighing parties. One still afternoon, when the crisp, dry cold made the blood dance in the veins, and eyes to sparkle, "all the world and his wife" were disporting themselves at a favourite skating place in the neighbourhood—a large, beautiful lake surrounded with fir trees and wastes of snow. The lake joined a river which could be followed for miles into wild tracts of country. A gleam of sunshine dashed the grey sky. Beautifully dressed women flashed by in sledges with tinkling bells, and the ring of the skates mingled with peals of merry laughter sounded through the clear air.

Away from the crowd, Léonie skated slowly up the river, like some graceful bird on the wing. She had been holding her small court as usual, but now she had got away from them all. She was thinking of her husband, and of a certain perfunctory kiss, as he prepared to leave her for the day.

Later, he had swept past in a sleigh, with a pretty woman. Léonie caught a glimpse of the fair, rather cruel face, ruddy hair, and eyes brilliant as steel—and as cold—and recognised one of the leaders of their world.

She was well aware that society had coupled the names of these two together, but it was not jealousy that caused the dull ache at her heart. She knew her husband only sought distraction in society—but that he should need distraction was so terrible to her.

At first they had been perfectly happy—then by degrees came a strange, increasing indifference, alternating with a feverish unrest—

clearly, he had something preying on his mind, but she had no clue, none whatever.

True, his relations had refused to recognise their marriage, but he had laughed them to scorn. That was not the reason that she, Léonie de Goncourt, rich, courted, envied, with all the world at her feet, had found life already so sad, that she had lost the one thing she prized most—her husband's love.

"My God," she thought, looking over the white landscape with hopeless eyes, "why does heaven give us such glimpses of happiness, only to take them away? And," she mused on, "the worst is that I still love him, but can do nothing."

Suddenly her meditations were interrupted, and a look almost of brightness came over her face, as she recognised Anthony Hamlyn, a tall, keen-faced Englishman, and the only man in Boston in whose attentions and friendship she had found real pleasure. He was silent by nature, but an acute observer of men and things. In society he was well known as an excellent shot and an all-round sportsman, and his gentle, courteous manners made him a general favourite.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Madame," he remarked. "I hope you are going to skate with me," he added, cheerfully; and they moved off with the graceful, swaying rhythm, which only two practised skaters can produce.

They skated about two miles, then Léonie stopped to take breath. Both had been unusually silent on the way.

"Do you know, Mr. Hamlyn," she said, regarding him intently, "you don't look nearly so well as you did—you are getting quite thin."

The man's face flushed, then whitened through the bronze of his skin, and he looked curiously at her. She made a perfect picture, in her dark furs and dress of vivid red—with a rose flush on her dainty face, and her eyes shining deeply, gloriously blue.

"Heavens," he thought, "how beautiful she is. Does she know it, I wonder? I could go down on my knees here on the ice, and worship her—in fact, make a thorough fool of myself." He sighed deeply, then tried to answer cheerily. "I think I've had a fit of the 'blues' lately, but it is a real pleasure to be here. And you?" he added, almost involuntarily.

It was her turn to pale, and a shadow came over her face. "I don't count," she said, lightly.

They skated back in the faint moonlight, past the quiet, white fields, under dark columns of fir trees, covered with icicles, which took queer, fantastic shapes—and then the spell and peace of the evening came over them both.

Léonie roused herself, and talked with her accustomed wit and charm, while her companion once more recognised her wonderful quiet fascination. "She is a witch," he thought, "with power to charm the hearts of men—and yet so true and good, so sympathetic."

When they got back, a great Ice Carnival had already begun on the lake. Fires had been lit on the islands, and there was a sort of encampment on one. Many of the skaters carried torches, some of them wore quaint costumes, and the whole effect of so many faces and fantastic figures, now flashing into the light, now disappearing in the shadows, was weird.

And the noise—the babble of merriment, the shrieks of laughter contrasted strangely with the solemn stillness of the river.

Léonie and Hamlyn watched it for a time, then he escorted her to her sleigh, and accepted the vacant seat.

That was a strange drive, over the snowy roads, beneath the cold winter moon, while myriads of stars scintillated in the frosty sky, and the sleigh bells rang out merrily.

The whole air seemed full of melody, and Hamlyn's pulses began to throb, and his heart to beat. It was a night of magic—and he turned to his companion. Her face shone out of the dark furs like a white flower, but he saw the shadow there, and felt a sudden chill. As he turned from her doorway, later, the chill remained, and he murmured sadly to himself, "Her heart is breaking, and I can do nothing."

Léonie came down to dinner, exquisitely dressed, and determined to make a stand, to win her husband's confidence if possible. She waited, first impatiently, then with a cold fear—finally she sent for De Goncourt's valet.

"Yes," he said, "Monsieur had gone away by the six train to New York. He had packed some things for Monsieur, who had not said when he expected to return. Would there not be a line, a message for Madame, which someone had forgotten—Madame's maid, perhaps—"

"Yes," Madame answered, quietly, "there probably was. Mon-

sieur had expected to be suddenly summoned to New York on urgent business."

"Noblesse oblige." Léonie went to two receptions that night, and played her society rôle, as we all have to at times. Then she broke down completely, and saw no one for several days. At the end of that time she sent for Hamlyn.

He came one cold afternoon into her pretty sitting-room, which always seemed so characteristic of the woman.

"Forgive me for troubling you," she said, as he stood regarding her in shocked silence at the change he saw. "Perhaps I am very unconventional, but you are a man of the world, and, I think—my best friend. I seem to have no one to advise me now my mother is dead," she added, with a sad smile. Then she told him all—how her husband had left her without a word or a line. "He does not wish me to know, I fear," she ended, "he has simply deserted me, and something tells me he will never come back."

Her manner was very quiet—almost frozen, but there were breaks in her voice, and a strained, hopeless look in her white face showed how she was suffering. An immense compassion seized Hamlyn, followed by a quick throb of fierce, exultant joy. He waited a moment, listening mechanically to the roar of the great city and the sleigh bells jingling outside, while a strange fire began to sparkle in his grey eyes.

"How can I advise her?" he thought. "Heavens! it is hard. She does not know—she has never guessed that she is all the world to me. One solution would be simple enough, in a few months, if she could only care for me—divorce is so easy in some of the States. Heaven forgive me, the thought is maddeningly sweet. But no, it would be criminal to speak—to make it more difficult for her. Not a word or a hint of mine shall disturb her. Then De Goncourt might come back—it seems incredible he can have left her. How shall I advise her? It is cruelly hard."

The fire in his eyes died out, leaving an infinite sadness, as these thoughts flashed across his mind, while through the silence of the room the echo of the bells seemed to jangle into his brain. He looked at the slight desolate figure, and again a great wave of compassion surged over him. Then he spoke quietly, gently advising her to stay on for a time, if possible, in case of news of her husband—then if she found the place intolerable, she could leave, and he

would give her any aid in his power. Meantime he advised her to hope, and offered to make any search—any enquiries.

Léonie's almost frozen calm had begun to thaw as he spoke, and now a flash came into her soft eyes, as she forbade this. "It would be useless," she said; "he must come of his own free will." But for the rest she thanked him gravely—sorrowfully, promising to think it over; and Hamlyn left her, conscious of a battle fought and won.

Quietly, unobtrusively he helped her through the weeks that followed, always trying to cheer and encourage her, and bravely did Léonie play her part, too; but at last the strain and anxiety became intolerable, and she left Boston.

Later on she went abroad, and Hamlyn felt that the best part of his life had gone with her. Nothing remained to him but a very sweet, very sad memory—a memory which never left him.

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### III.

"TOUT COMPRENDRE, C'EST TOUT PARDONNER."

FIFTEEN years after—a reception is being held at the British Embassy in Paris. A brilliant multitude of men and women are thronging the reception rooms, or slowly making their way up the spacious staircase. Fair Americans are here, members of the old French nobility, of the new *régime*, statesmen, soldiers, celebrities of divers nationalities jostle each other in the crowd.

Near the doorway a French officer was standing—a colonel of *Chasseurs*, wearing several decorations; a remarkably handsome, distinguished-looking man, with dark hair, slightly streaked with grey, and a keen bronzed face. This officer appeared to be looking about him with a good deal of curiosity. "It is strange to come back to Paris, after so many years of exile," he remarked, with a smile, to a friend. "My wife has a great many acquaintances already, but I feel quite a stranger here."

"If you will permit me, Colonel," the other replied, "I should like to present you to Mrs. Vansittart."

"And who," enquired the Colonel, with a sort of lazy interest, "is Mrs. Vansittart?"

"A most charming American—a widow, and an immense favourite."

"An American, did you say?" said the other, reflectively. "Well, introduce me at the first opportunity."

A movement of the crowd sent them on, then someone said, "Is that De Goncourt? I remembered him about fifteen or sixteen years ago—quite a crack rider—won that race at Neuilly. But the odd part was, they thought him rather a duffer at military riding when he first joined."

The remark seemed to strike a lady who was standing near—a tall, stately woman, still beautiful, though she had left her youth behind. There were threads of grey in her brown hair, and a line or two of care and sorrow in her face, but her blue eyes shone brilliant and undimmed as of old. She was known in Parisian society as Mrs. Vansittart—her real name was Léonie de Goncourt. Ghosts seemed to be about her that night. Memories of that ball seventeen years ago—it seemed a lifetime, as she recalled Léon's words of passionate love and the dark face of Raoul de Goncourt.

"Who is that lady?" she enquired of the man who was talking to her, indicating a handsome brunette with melting eyes and movements full of a slow, lazy grace which was almost oriental.

"That is Madame de Goncourt. Her husband is a very distinguished soldier, but almost a stranger after fifteen years' service in Algeria."

Her eyes still followed the graceful figure, and she turned presently to Hamlyn, who had joined her. These two had met in Paris most unexpectedly, after years of silence—years in which his love for her had remained unchanged. He had experienced that "hope deferred which maketh the heart sick"—nay, at times he had been without hope—nevertheless, for him she had always been the one woman in the world.

"That must be the wife of Raoul de Goncourt," she said. "He is the cousin of—my husband. It seems impossible that no one should have a clue," she added, with a sigh.

"Ah, Léonie, why not be content? He must be dead—try and think so," urged Hamlyn. "Do not waste all your precious life haunted with this spectre of the past. Surely after fifteen years—"

"Forgive me," she answered, softly. "It isn't fair to worry you—but there is something in the air here—something uncanny. Perhaps it is what that man said." She ended abruptly, as at that moment someone came up and began to introduce Colonel de Gon-

court. This person stepped on one side, she turned with a start, saw a tall soldier, covered with decorations—then her eyes met his, and she recognised—her husband. One instant of frozen, horrible silence. Léonie was half conscious of a desperate, pitying glance from Anthony Hamlyn, and she rallied her sinking faculties with an enormous effort, only a deadly whiteness came over her face, which pallor seemed reflected in her husband's dark features—he seemed as if turned to stone. Making a slight curtsey, and receiving a mechanical bow in return, she murmured a few polite words, then, turning to Hamlyn, she muttered, "Take me away from this, I can't keep up any longer."

\* \* \* \*

"I say, Monsieur, that you have acted like a coward and a scoundrel," said Hamlyn, deliberately.

It was the morning after, and he had sought an early interview with De Goncourt. So far the two men had spoken quietly, but there was a strange suppressed passion about Hamlyn. "Do you realise," he went on, "how you have spoiled the life of this woman, whom you have deserted and deceived? I know something of it—I am her friend. I have loved her for years—but she would never consent to marry me." He stopped a moment, thinking of her words in a letter, which was graven on his memory, "Alas, for me, my love is with my husband—and so I feel it will be, always. Perhaps, if I had met you first, I might have been—happy." "Do you realise what you have done?" he repeated, with a hard ring in his voice.

"Whatever your opinion of me may be, Monsieur," replied the other, "no man shall call Léon de Goncourt a coward. Monsieur will appoint a time for my friends to call upon him."

"He is a dead shot, they say," reflected Hamlyn, as he walked away from the house. "The chances of my surviving this meeting are small. Well, it's worth while—for her sake—and life is not too pleasant anyhow."

\* \* \* \*

All that day Léonie tried to rally her faculties, and steel herself for the interview which some instinct told her might come. At last, just as the afternoon was waning, Colonel de Goncourt was announced. Léonie rose to her feet, but she was overpowered by a deadly faintness, and the room seemed to be going round. Then

the mists cleared away, and thus husband and wife stood face to face, after fifteen years of separation. A flood of memories rushed over both, as she stood in the fading light, silent and motionless.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he exclaimed at last, "how beautiful you are still." Then more rapidly, "Yes, the Englishman was right, I have been both a coward and a scoundrel. Léonie—my poor Léonie, I am come to tell you my story."

Then he told her a strange history—how, after his first happiness, he had been seized with a terrible home-sickness—a passionate longing to be once more on French soil, followed by a haunting despair at his own cowardice. He, a Goncourt, a descendant of a long line of soldiers—that he should be the first to shirk his duty—to desert. This feeling grew always stronger, till at last it killed his love. Then, in a strange, mad moment, he escaped, and found his way to Marseilles, not daring to try the north of France. With one of those strange coincidences which occur more often in real life than in books, he found his cousin Raoul de Goncourt at Marseilles, dying in a hotel. The young man was on his way to join the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, and he had fallen ill so suddenly that there was no time to send for his relations. Léon was able to soothe his cousin's last moments, then, in a flash, he saw his path made smooth. He took the dead man's papers and effects, and joined his regiment. There he rose from the ranks, saw a good deal of service, and became one of the most well-known soldiers in Algeria. Afterwards the life became lonely, and he married a beauty of Algeria, solacing his conscience with the thought that, as a true son of the Church, his marriage with a Protestant was illegal.

All this was told to Léonie, down to the last great wrong, with little additions of local colouring, and brief glimpses of the exciting life of an Algerian soldier.

"Do not think," he said in conclusion, "that I have not had my moments of remorse. I have had many. I am not come to try to excuse my wrong doing—that, I feel, is impossible,—but only to render you what tardy justice I can, to enable you to shake off the burden of fifteen years, and to pray you to forgive me."

He paused, and the woman he had wronged sat motionless in the dark room. She had listened with a perfect comprehension. Everything was now clear to her—among other things, that she no longer loved this man—only a lingering, sad affection remained, the ghost

of a dead past. Also, she recognised her own share in the mistake—her encouragement of the rash, impetuous passion of a mere boy, and the wrong she had done in making him forsake his duty.

"Léon," she said at last, rising from her seat and going over to where he stood, half wearily—and there was a noble, beautiful light in her face,—“I was to blame at first—I understand—and I forgive you, as I hope to be forgiven.”

And as De Goncourt looked into her eyes, and held her hand for the last time, he felt that he had missed something in his life.

“I was never worthy of her,” he thought, as late that night he critically examined a small revolver which he had taken from its case, “and this is the only way out of the tangle for all of us.” At that moment someone knocked. “*Holà,*” he called, “who is there?”

“An urgent letter for Monsieur,” said a voice, “from the Minister of War.”

“After all,” he thought, as he read the despatch ordering him back, at once, to Algiers, “perhaps this is the better way—at all events, it is my duty, and a Goncourt shall not fail twice.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Two months later, a dark-eyed, weeping woman read the despatches telling of her husband’s death in a skirmish against the Arab tribes. Another woman read them, too, and there were tears in her blue eyes, but thankfulness in her heart that he had known she had forgiven.

## The Ideal House.

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SERVANTS.

It is more than likely that Angelina, especially if she happen to be the daughter of a somewhat severe housekeeper, will start on her new life with what we may call fads about her servants. "Poor things," she will perhaps say to her Edwin, "I'm sure they have a very hard life anyway. We won't grind them down, dear; we'll just treat them as we would like to be treated ourselves."

So, when Angelina, in the first flush of her new-found happiness, is setting about the arrangements of her new and dainty nest, she takes especial care of the servants and their comfort, forgetting quite that they have not come from homes such as hers, but have been brought up with a very limited supply of comfort and with but few of those luxuries which to Edwin and Angelina have long been held in the light of absolute necessities.

I knew a young housekeeper once who, after furnishing her house, said with pride that she had nothing worse than Brussels carpets in all her rooms, including the servants' bedrooms. There were three servants' bedrooms in her domicile, each neatly, even daintily furnished with complete suites of ash-wood, each with its marble topped wash-stand, its little bookshelf and medicine cupboard combined, with gas in each apartment, and a nice splasher and square of Chinese matting to stand in front of the wash-stand, so as to save the good Brussels carpet. Each wardrobe had a looking-glass in the door, and each room had a pretty set of crockery such as would have been suitable for the chamber of a young daughter of the house. Now if she had gone a little further and had every morning, or at least twice a week, made it her business to make a little tour of inspection through these rooms, and had made severe remarks on any neglect or untidiness she happened to find in them, all might have been well; but unfortunately among this Angelina's fads was a certain delicacy of feeling concerning the privacy of the young ladies who were employed to minister to her domestic comfort. "So horrid, you know, Edwin, " she said to her equally

ignorant spouse, "that poor girls should not have a hole to call their very own. It isn't as if they had a nice large servants' hall where they can keep their own belongings. They've only really got their bedrooms for their own."

"I have an idea," said Edwin, "that my mother used to go round the servants' bedrooms at stated times."

"Oh, yes, I daresay she would," was Angelina's reply, and there was just a shade of an inflection on the word "she," such as warned Edwin off any more reminiscences as to his mother's management. And Angelina had her own way, and her servants' bedrooms continued to be her pride and occasionally her boast. But not for long. It happened one night when she and Edwin got home from a rather late party, that he remarked—"Oh, by Jove, darling, I quite forgot to tell you that I have a very important appointment for ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and if cook doesn't manage to send up our breakfast earlier than she has done lately, I shall be too late for it."

"All right," replied Angelina cheerfully, "I'll run up and tell her to be sure to give us the tea in good time."

Accordingly, she did run up to the cook's bedroom, that pretty and dainty chamber which she had given over to the presiding genius of her kitchen with such pride and good faith only a few months before. And what a sight met her eyes. The room in inexplicable confusion, the towel-rail broken, the splasher half hanging down the wall, the Chinese matting put under the window instead of in its legitimate place, the carpet dirty and stained, and a sooty kettle standing upon it near to the wash-stand, showing that the lady asleep in the bed had not taken the trouble to use the neat hot water can provided for her, but had preferred to bring up the kitchen kettle, which she had dumped down upon the Brussels carpet. Without waking the sleeping cook, the heart-sickened Angelina was moved to go into the other rooms hard by. In one she found an empty bed and a state of almost indescribable confusion; in the other a girl lying fast asleep, a book in her hand and the gas jet just over her head turned to the very full. This damsel had changed the position of her bed so as to be able to have the gas just above her, that she might the better read in ease and comfort. It must for the sake of truth be owned that poor Angelina went downstairs to her own chamber in a towering passion, and that the

Next morning there were ructions of a wholly abnormal nature in that charming house. Morning light, too, brought further delinquencies to view. Candle-grease spilled from end to end of the three rooms, windows which had apparently not been opened since the three ladies took possession of them; beds which were made only when fresh sheets were necessary, furniture scratched and defaced, wall-paper marked and spoiled. "One would think," cried Angelina, in her desperation, "that you had actually tried how much damage you could do, instead of showing me that you appreciated being well treated and comfortably lodged."

"And that," put in Edwin, at this moment, "is why my gas bill is out of all proportion to the size of the house. My dear, I shall have the gas taken out of those three rooms at once."

To this Angelina could say nothing, nor, poor girl, did she desire to say anything. Her faith in the power of kindness and in human nature had received a terrible shock, but as a housewife she had got a lesson which stood her in good stead during all the rest of her life. From that time forward, Angelina made it a rule to go through her servants' bedrooms once or twice every week, and to speak with great severity if she saw any signs of waste and neglect therein. This is, of course, the bounden duty of every house-mistress who does not keep a regular housekeeper, and I may as well say at once that, in the great majority of cases, very much attention to the lodging of servants is labour thrown away.

But Angelina ought to see that her servants have each a separate bed, that the bed is clean and good and such as she would not object to sleep on herself. Curtains are not necessary for anyone, but each bed should have a sufficiency of proper clothing. One under and one thick or two thinner over blankets, a quilt of some darkish cotton material, and either a thick wadded overlay or an eider quilt. Twilled cotton sheets and a decent supply of both bolster and pillow slips she should provide for each one. No servants should be expected to do with less than this, and if a girl is of a cold nature, Angelina will be wise to give her an extra rug or blanket. It is not at all a bad plan to have the thick red army blankets for servants' beds, but, in this case, they should be sent to the wash or dry cleaner each year whether they look dirty or not.

With regard to the covering of the floors, Angelina will be the wisest to content herself with having a couple of good sized rugs,

one beside the bed, the other in front of the dressing-table. Possibly she can arrange the room so as to set the dressing-table at one end of the rug and the wash-stand at the other, but if this is not possible she had better provide a third rug, so that there is no actual necessity for the maid to walk about on the bare boards. I would give every room a good sized wardrobe, for it is bad to have clothes hanging about and extremely difficult for a servant to keep her things neat and tidy if she has, as the phrase goes, to live in her box. And every servant's room should have a fair sized dressing-table and glass, so that there can be no excuse either for using that of her mistress or for being untidy in appearance. It is a wise plan for Angelina to paste in a conspicuous part of each servant's bedroom a piece of paper with a few rules such as these.

" You are expected to open your window every morning before you leave the room, unless it should be very wet or foggy."

" You are expected to keep your room swept and dusted and to make your bed every day. All slops must be emptied and the toilet table and wash-stand must be attended to before eleven o'clock."

And Angelina must be prepared to see these rules enforced, although I admit such a duty is one of the most unpleasant which can fall upon the shoulders of a young housewife.

Another point upon which Angelina must be particular is in observing the fixed "days out" of her domestics. I once knew a young couple who had each lived in a large and airy house in the country, who married and went to live in a London semi-suburb, one of those wildernesses of bricks and mortar, with rows of seemingly interminable streets, which in winter have a knack of catching all the winds that blow, but which in summer have never a breath of air to cool their baking and blistering pavements. This young couple fell upon what to them were very evil days, and had, for want of means, to stay in town (yes, they called it "town" just as if it were Park Lane), all through the hot weather. They suffered, poor children, and longed for the cool depths of the blessed country, as your real Londoner does not know how it is to long. "Edwin," said this poor little Angelina, "how awful this is. Do you think we shall live through it?"

" Yes, but it is stuffy and beastly. Put on your hat and we'll take the bus right up to the terminus and back. We shall get a

lovely drive through the empty streets, and if there is a breath of air, we shall catch it."

"Oh, that will be lovely," cried Angelina, who was on the whole a contented soul and made happy by a little thing. "But I must just speak to cook before we go."

She disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, and in three minutes came back with a scared face. "Edwin, darling," she said, almost gasping, "you've no idea what that kitchen is like. Most of anything like the black hole of Calcutta, I should think. They are sitting at the door leading into the garden, poor things, and the flies are as black on the walls as a cloud. Edwin, it's wicked to let women, human beings, live in such an atmosphere."

"Why don't you tell them to go out?" said Edwin.

Angelina hailed the suggestion as a good one and skipped back gaily enough to tell the two servants that they might go out to get a breath of fresh air. And after this it became a regular thing that every evening after dinner the two servants should, as soon as the dinner things were cleared away, go out for a turn, a custom which in double-quick time developed into the work being scurried through and the pair invariably staying out till midnight or later. In spite of the tenderness of heart which had prompted the plan, the indulgence proved to be but the beginning of the end. In an incredibly short space of time, the servants of that limited establishment were dissatisfied with everything provided for them; one went the length of refusing to do the work legitimately falling to her share, and the other took to masquerading around in her young mistress's clothes, and also in the guise of her young mistress's sister. They had to go; and this young Angelina learned that it does not pay to go out of the ordinary course in dealing with servants.

And, after all, hard though my conclusions may appear, when one comes to think of the lives of the class from which servants are usually drawn, what seems almost like privations to their masters and mistresses, must be the height of luxury to them. When one thinks of the noise, the want of privacy, the limited accommodation, the hand-to-mouth style of living, the scarcity of money, the absence of home comforts, the actual discomfort in which the working classes are brought up, it is at last realised that it is no particular kindness to indulge servants too much. Certainly it is a remarkable

fact that servants themselves have the greatest contempt for those who humour them too much and consider them in too many ways; and it is equally a fact that houses where one is afraid to ask for any small extra service because the master and mistress don't like them to be "put upon," are the most uncomfortable houses in the whole world. Decidedly the best plan for Angelina is to begin with a just and liberal code, and to see that it is enforced. After all, if a servant is dissatisfied with her place, she has always the remedy in her own hands and can leave it at any moment.

I have so far only treated of women servants, but the same rules in the main apply to those of the other sex. With the exception of indoor servants, men are certainly more easy to manage than women. A coachman or gardener usually knows his work, and it is his life's profession and not a mere makeshift until he chances to get married, as in the case of women servants, so he does it as a blacksmith or a carpenter performs his daily toil, and knowing that excellence in all details will bring its own reward. With ordinary indoor servants too, we have the same advantage, that they have chosen this work as their *métier* in life.

Let no one of my readers bring up other views which I may have expressed in the past, for in these sketches I am, it must be remembered, treating of the *ideal* house, and my own past mistakes and blunders have largely helped me to determine in my own mind what an ideal house should be. Personally, I have always been soft towards my servants of all grades, but I am bound to confess that with every day that goes over my head, I find myself in greater sympathy with those older housewives whose *régime* I have thought hard and whose rules I believed to be too severe. I still keep my original views that all servants should be well fed, that he or she should have variety in their food, that they should be able to enjoy a good night's rest, to have a bath as often as possible (and no Angelina should retain for a single day the services of either man or woman who does not take a bath at least once a week.) They should have fixed and reasonable hours of recreation, and a certain amount of leisure time during the day, while politeness should be a *sine qua non*. But every domestic servant should be under strict supervision, and rules, once made, should be kept, any neglect of duty or deviation from the rules of the house should be at once visited with immediate comment and mark of displeasure. Let me

advise my young Angelina never under any circumstances to take a servant back again, unless for some such reason as absence abroad of Edwin and Angelina, in which case the break has been made for no fault. Let me advise her also never to ask a servant to stay who has once given notice; she had better lose the best servant that ever came into a house than do this. Never overlook a dishonesty and never give a false character. A great many mistresses feel when once the irritation of parting with a servant is over, "Oh well, I don't like to keep a poor thing out of a place," and so say all that they can in the departed one's favour, never giving a thought to the unfortunate mistress who is taking their word and perhaps an untrustworthy servant on trust.

In conclusion, let me strongly advise Angelina if she gets at times disheartened by her English servants, not to try to mend them by having French ones. I have never had German servants, but I know Dutch ones well and French ones better. English servants are the best of all that I know; French the worst. Some French cooks are good, in the French way, but of others I have found them totally ignorant of their duties, incapable of following even a clearly laid method of work, excitable and hysterical if crossed, entirely immoral and deceitful, slipshod and careless to a degree. A lady blessed with French servants said to me the other day, "Jeanne has points. She brings me sprigs of blessed box, and gathers all the best flowers out of my own garden, which she brings me with an air and a smile as if they were a present. I would much rather she would do her work and dust my bedrooms, but—she is Jeanne."

*(To be concluded)*

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## Love's Decay.

A SKETCH.

By ROBERT CHICHESTER.

Author of "LIFE THE PROOF," "AN EVERYDAY AFFAIR," etc.

THEY sat together at the wicker garden table. On a blue dish lay two or three late autumn peaches, but they had not touched them. Beyond, lay the lake and the stone terrace steps, and the carved vases full of scarlet velvet geraniums and scented leaves. The line of blue far woods met the violet sky. From where they sat rolled long, smooth lawns, curved downwards to the water's edge. Two or three peacocks, with their tails trailing negligently, strutted to and fro upon the long shell walks. The haze of summer and of summer twilight hung sleepily over the copper beeches and the great fans of the horse-chestnuts.

"You women have an odd way of looking at things," he was saying slowly.

He was a tall man, and well formed, with long hands and long feet, and a face meant for gaiety and much pleasure, in sharp contrast to the hair that had already turned quite grey.

The woman opposite him smiled languidly. She wore elaborate clothes, with long stole-ends of biscuit-tinted lace, and turquoises, and grey *suede* gloves, and rose-pink *chine*. She was lying back in her chair, playing with a big bunch of heliotrope and jessamine that had begun to droop and fall. Her eyes, with the white lids lowered a little, were very lovely—looking, as they did, as though they had wept much and often.

"Your opinions are so inconsequent," he said, but he smiled softly as he spoke.

She looked up. The bare hand holding the grey glove quivered obviously.

"Do not try to fathom them, then," she said, in a low voice. "It would be far wiser," she went on, unsteadily, "for you to give up arguing with me, Eddie; for I am not going to listen. I can be very deaf, sometimes, my friend."

The lights were shifting just above the purple hills ; perhaps that was the reason that his face lost colour suddenly.

" You mean you do not dare to listen," he said, below his breath.

There was a pause ; a peacock's scream filled up the silence.

" *Dare !*" she repeated, " *dare !*" Her soft cheeks turned a little white, and the eyes flashed fire beneath the heavy lids. " You will understand—one day—that I am not the person to change," she said.

He laughed loudly, harshly.

" I wish that was the character of all of us," he sneered. " Fidelity ! Never wishing to alter ! What more can one want or ask ? "

He was leaning forward, but she was staring immovably at a great bush of syringa that the soft wind was playing with, by the fountain's weather-worn basin.

" One can ask too much—one does not get it, usually," she said, with an affectation of calm.

There was another silence.

" You take a queer delight in laughing at me," he said, slowly. " Perhaps—who knows ?—one day, you will wish you had been kinder."

She did not answer ; it may have been that she was unable. The lights quivered again. Then he seemed to have lost his head a little. The scent of the cherry-pie at her breast crept up to his face, sleepily, tenderly.

" I wonder," he said, hoarsely, " how long it is that you have known I loved you ? I would not, dear, if I could help myself ; I would spare you any annoyances from me. Still—" his voice broke off harshly.

She did not move. A bit of her lace scarf blew gently across his long fingers. He leant forward, with his earnest face and his eager eyes, it was almost a boy's intensity of passion that had, for once, returned.

" Muriel, why won't you speak to me ? " And a peacock passed on the terrace, a blaze of greens and blues, among the oleanders. Then she lifted her eyes, and they met his. Her hand was lying on the table, and quite steadily he laid his own over it. " Tell me—at least—you thought once—" His lips twitched as he spoke.

" You must not say that you care, it is not allowable, my friend,"

she said, her eyes smiling, but the hand beneath the man's shook painfully.

"What do conventions matter? You and I—we—understand! You are free, comparatively free as yet."

"*Free!*" she echoed the word almost wildly. "No, I am not free at all. And conventions are our laws of being. You speak as though I could change. I am not so sure. We must not say what we would—"

"Then if you thought it possible—" His face flushed from lip to brow; the battle of pulses in his throat almost choked him. "You own it then?" he panted, after awhile.

He seemed to live years in those brief seconds; to exist through hours of feeling and passion. The society in which he lived offered him but few sensations above the ordinary; and past years spent, as heir to a peerage, at Eton, at Sandhurst, in the Guards, had left but little room or possibility for sentiment. He was crushing the soft, white hand beneath his own; his eyes sought hers.

"You do yourself an injustice, Mu," he said, in an altered voice. "You have no right—no sort of right—to ruin, to overthrow—"

The eyes with the circles round them got ridiculously moist and shining. Her education had not included a grounding in self-examination or in truth. She began to speak with a ghost of a laugh, that quickly died away.

"In this world we cannot choose—" she began.

"Don't deceive yourself. Think one moment; think of all that depends—our whole lives."

He bent nearer. The lights changed and shifted again; a warmer glow deepened and fell. Then two big tears slipped slowly down her face.

"One must think of honour—occasionally!" she said, with an attempt at composure.

The laces round her throat rose and fell, and the diamond charm at the end of the turquoise chain caught in the heliotrope and tore it.

"*Honour!*" He sprang up. "What is a paltry orthodox honour compared to love, and to what love can make of a life! Compared to doing what one knows is right—"

She was lying back idly, and although the brim of her hat, with the velvet pansies in it, threw a shade across her face, he could see its pallor distinctly.

"What's right!" she echoed, vaguely. "You think, then, seriously, that to throw over the man the whole world knows one is engaged to—to forget one's promises—" He moved and stood before her. The rose lights fell upon his uncovered head.

"I am no debater; I only know that to marry where you do not love is base sacrilege. That to sell yourself for this Court, this park, these acres—"

His face had hardened and soured; but an involuntary start of pain on her part made him turn and pause. He bent down and caught the cold hands playing with the flowers.

"I did not mean to hurt you, Muriel. It's only my rough way—only my wretched rough way. I suppose—I must suppose that you think you are doing your duty. I cannot think you bad and hard and cold, dear, when I hear your voice—when I see your sweet eyes."

She looked up through blinding tears. "Sir George is so good—so considerate; you must understand my position. I dare not work him so great an injury," she said.

He turned his head to where the blue woods met the violet sky.

"You would rather break my heart," he muttered, huskily.

"You are very cruel, Eddie," she whispered, faintly.

"Then I grow like you," he said, without turning.

She got up, and a little shower of broken blooms fell on the grass.

"I cannot help what's done; it is too late to turn," she said, with trembling lips and hands. The twilight slipped down deeper; the meeting line of hills and sky was merged into a soft blue glow. Then he felt her cold hand catch his own. "Say something kind—we must part now," she almost sobbed. He did not move. "Eddie—for the sake of the past!"

He could feel her great eyes searching his face eagerly, hungrily; but he did not turn or speak. The scent of her heliotrope stole up again, but he shook her clinging hand away—then moved and left her.

A minute later she heard his dog cart's wheels on the great avenue. He had gone. He was on his way to the house he was staying at on the other side of the downs; he would never come back to plead again. This was the end.

For a moment her sight failed her; the memory of half a hundred charming moments in which she had played so great a part, returned to sting her. This, then, was the parting hour. The peacocks

passed in stately procession up and down the terrace in the sun's last shafts of colour. A flight of wild-fowl skimmed the placid water's surface with their tireless wings.

Then she awoke to reality. It struck her that the price she had paid for these terraces and trees and lands would prove a heavier one than she had imagined.

Down the filbert-walk to the left, came Sir George Evelyn and her father. They were discussing agricultural prospects; and Sir George's plump face was, for him, almost animated. She went to meet them, and listened with well-acted interest to Sir George's courteous inquiries after the disposal of her afternoon. But as he drew her hand through his arm, she shivered as with cold.

"The evenings get a little damp this time of year," he said, in his monotonous voice.

And together the three strolled in to dress for dinner.

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One of the biggest houses on the west side of Grosvenor Square was brilliantly lighted. There was a long *queue* of carriages, a knot of sleepy footmen by the awning, the strains of tender music from the windows, thrown wide open on the balcony.

Sir George and Lady Evelyn were giving one of their celebrated crushes, and the hour was nearly one in the morning. Five years had left their not unkindly mark upon the woman who stood receiving and smiling mechanically. They had accentuated the underlying pathos of the face—although it was only when she laughed that one noticed how sad an expression she wore. None guessed that she had been weak enough to voluntarily keep an old and foolish sentiment alive.

But Lady Evelyn had not forgotten. So that it was naturally an acute shock when Edward Serle came into her rooms with old Mrs. MacEvans and a *débutante* in white bengaline and lilies. He had spent most of the five years that intervened in solitary wanderings abroad, and now having thrown up his commission in the Guards, he was, so the world said, looking out for a wife. Everyone knew that he was still heir to the peerage, to which a tough old uncle clung with such fierce tenacity, and also that he was not so poor as he had been.

The band was playing something of Weber's, dreamy, luxurious, suggestive. After the first conventional greeting, he had seen but

little of his hostess, surrounded, as she had been, by friends and flatterers. He had answered very languidly the *débutante's* inanities, and had spoken to one or two men about the charms of his long absence from town.

He certainly was looking remarkably well and high spirited, and handsome; and old Sir George, passing him in the crowd, seemed to have put on in weight and size, what of Time's ravages Serle had out-witted and left behind. Once or twice as Muriel neared him, she heard his low, gay voice and his pleasant laugh, as she had listened to it long dead years ago—only so much more heart-whole, careless and content.

Somehow it sent a vague, indefinable thrill through her. Could it possibly be that he was glad to see her again?

Then, as a stream of people passed her, going down to supper, she found herself answering her guests' questions at random, while she watched Edward Serle's fine head and grey eyes as he bent over some other woman. Involuntarily she leant her hand on the oak rail near her; a ridiculous longing that amounted to actual pain, to recall the past but for a brief moment, made her hungry eyes follow him eagerly, strainedly, before they blurred over and made her turn away.

The folk began to "go on" to something else. Sir George, rather damp and very puffy, helped a withered dowager down to her carriage. As in a dream, she heard his slowly modulated voice accepting to play golf the following day at Wimbledon.

Gradually the big, brilliant rooms grew empty. She shivered as she said good-bye to some "particular" friends, who remarked that she looked white and fagged.

"Quite a ghost of what she was," they said, as they reached the hall. "Those pathetic sort of women never wear well. It is your hard type of black beauty that would shine, were it kicked from one end of Europe to the other."

The woman with the faded face crossed to a great sconce of candles near her, to save a trail of orchids and smilax that hung perilously near the flame. Someone coming quickly up the stairs behind her, told himself, with the practiced eye of the critic, that she made a wonderful picture in the rose light, with the long sweep of the dove-gray satin train, the old lace, the lemon carnations, the oyster-tinted pearls.

"So we meet again—*en fête!*" he said, lightly.

She turned slowly, and lifted her tired eyes to Serle's face.  
"Rather old for gala work," she laughed, a little bitterly.

He put out his hand in the old frank way she knew so well. "Say 'how are you?' Just now we only met publicly." He took her hands warmly.

"It seems centuries—does it not?" she said.

"A good time, certainly. But roving about makes the years skip wonderfully. And *you*? You have been awfully gay, I suppose?" The thought ran through his brain, as he looked at her, that the gaiety had dealt very harshly with her.

She moved to the rails of the staircase, and leant over them, looking at nothing. The music began again.

"You are not at all changed—in the face," she said, with a husky note in her voice.

He came and leant over the rails at her side. There was a silence.

"Seeing you reminds me of the court and the peacocks, where you and I settled affairs," he said, smiling into her face.

She turned from the calm amusement in his eyes, and flushed from lip to brow. "It was a beginning—and an end," she said.

There was another pause.

"Sometimes," he said, "in the past years, when I was quite alone, or ill, or a bit home-sick, I would seem to be sitting there on the terrace opposite you, again, with the scent of the syringa about us. And I seemed to see your face cameo'd against the violet lights and shades, and to hear——"

A dreamy sense of youth—a sense of the buried summers gone—stole over her very pleasantly. "And *now*—do you never think of it *now*?" she almost whispered.

He threw up his head with its grey hair and its nonchalant shining eyes. "At thirty-nine, one grows out of such sentiments," he said, lightly. "One has but little time for worn-out romances at this end of the century—don't you find it so?"

She moved uneasily, and took refuge in generalities. "One has but little time to do anything, I think," she said, "except to grow fagged and grey." Then, after a while, as the valse the band throbbed out stole through the scented rooms, "I am glad to have seen you again. It almost makes one feel a girl once more. But

so much has come and gone in these five years. They have made an old woman of me, Eddie."

If he was surprised at the christian name, he had the good taste not to show it.

"Do not talk nonsense. You are as young as ever," he said, carelessly. "I hear your parties are grand successes. Judging by this one—"

She put out her hand to stop him. "Never mind compliments—now," she said. There was some little weary note in her voice that touched him with a queer pathos of its own.

"You look ill, and awfully tired. You should go and lie down. You are dead-beat," he said, kindly. A feeling of pity for her altered looks and unsteady lips made his eyes softer than he meant.

And then they shook hands.

"One is apt to look tired when one has nothing to live for," she said, in a broken whisper.

The calm look left him as she spoke. Something of a slight pallor, too, crept up under the tan of his cheeks. "You take a sadder view of life than you did," he said, gravely.

"The years have taught me that," she said.

"They have given me—have left me—experience, if nothing else." The throbs of some old-fashioned love song echoed softly, gently, suggestively.

A footman crossed the hall with a fresh jug of iced coffee. She raised her arms from the balustrade, and eased the string of pearls at her throat as though they choked her.

"You must make haste, and you will get some soup before you go. You must feel very strange, being back again. It is like speaking to a spirit of the dead," she said, dreamily.

But his gay mood had passed away. "Thank you, I will get something. Coming home is more sad than strange. So many people have forgotten me. It is late, I suppose. Good-night, then—Mu!" he said. He wondered vaguely why, as their hands touched, she did not lift her face, or why, as she spoke, her pale lips shook so.

"I have not forgotten you, my friend; no! Good-night—and good-bye," she said.

He turned and walked away.

Then she went to the stairs, leaning a trifle forward. The music

was all over. "Think sometimes of the peacocks and the terrace, Eddie!" she laughed down to him. "Don't forget it altogether!" There was an entreating note in her voice that she had neglected, for once, to hide.

He was half-way down, but he paused and looked up through the soft light. It struck him as odd that the grey of her gown almost matched the colour of her face. He began to answer, then stopped. A moment later, he nodded, with a forced chill smile, and was gone.

Outside in the close July night air, he walked on slowly, with his head bent. "She set me thinking to-night," he said to himself. "And if she had not carved out her life for herself, I should find it in my heart to pity her. I am not so sure but that I pity her now. What an existence this is we lead, with its innumerable turns and twists! What we adored but yesterday, we do not care about to-day, and to-morrow"—a shadow fell across his usually smiling eyes—"to-morrow, will have quite forgotten!"

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Lady Evelyn had opened the window of her white-and-gold room upstairs, overlooking the silent square and the dusty plane trees. She was still in her satin gown; the flowers at her breast were drooping there still. When she turned to look in the glass, she almost smiled into the eyes of the disappointed woman who looked back at her. Then she tore off the spare sheet of a note that had been brought her, and scribbled a few vague lines on it in pencil;

"My dear,—I really do not think that you meant to show me so clearly that you had forgotten. I know five years make a long, long spell to go on remembering in. Still, it seems that they have snatched away nothing from you—nothing but memories that are best left alone. As for me, I think that I have just lost all. I am so tired, so weak, so aged! Eddie, my poor dear, the cherished half of myself, if ever you could scorn me, listen to what I say. If I could, this hour, start fresh and begin again . . . It is so dark out there in the square . . . Everyone is gone . . . I can see the tops of the trees waving against the stretch of sky between the houses . . . There is a moment's rest for me—at last. And I am so tired that I feel as though I could sleep on for a year. . . . You were always so kind, so good to me! I am sure you did not mean to hurt me . . . But if you only knew how, on soft nights like these,

it has been my foolish fancy to sit awhile alone and dream that I am back in the finished past again ; that you and I . . . Oh forgive me ; for my life is so cold—so cold and grey and passionless ! Give me my pardon, then, my dear, dear heart. Take my tears for ever having played with yours! . . . I have come to the end of my paper, and my eyes are so very tired that they will not see any longer. When you read it—if you should ever read it——”

She had fallen forward, sobbing by the open window. Far up in a tranquil heaven, the moon's gleams fell across the diamonds and the grey dress and the hidden face.

The door opened, and a maid came in with two cups of coffee, followed by Sir George. “Ah, Muriel, done up? I am sure you look it. Come nearer the light and have some coffee. Those lemon carnations are the very tone for that dove-grey of yours. You looked charming, my dear—charming. Everything was a great success. What do you say?” He wiped his forehead and yawned.

“Everything was a great success—quite,” she repeated, vaguely. There was a little silence.

“Who is the note from that you hold?” he asked, sitting back with the relief of a stout and comfort-loving man.

She was still standing, though her limbs ached painfully with fatigue. “Nothing, only memoranda,” she answered. She turned and read the sheet over slowly to herself, then tore it deliberately across. “It is such nonsense,” she said, lifting her wet eyes. “As if one could possibly forget it all; although the peacocks are all dead and gone—since then.”

Sir George looked a little mystified. “You mean at the Court? Did you like them? We will get some more, if you care about it.”

She pressed her hand across the big eyes with the feverish glitter in them. “Oh! no, never—never! I could not bear to see their blues and greens! I could not bear to hear their screaming. It would break my heart—I know it would! George, promise me that you will never, never get them——”

He did not answer, but pushed her chair a little nearer. “My dear child, you are overstrung—overtired.”

Suddenly she sank down, crouching as though to hide her drawn white face from the lamp's inquisitive circle of light.

The old man sat in silence, contentedly sipping his black coffee,

and blinking sleepily. He did not understand his wife. He supposed that he never would. The knowledge did not particularly disconcert him.

The morning began to peep in at the open window, putting the artificial light to shame with its clear glimmer. They sat on together for a short while longer, and then Sir George, yawning, and only half awake, went off to his own room. The woman in the grey satin sat on, with her untasted coffee at her side. It was strange, she thought, that the July night should have turned so terribly cold. She was back again on the terraced gardens. She was back again on the flower-hung corridor, and he was saying farewell for ever. In her ears echoed again his low, gay laugh. She flung out her arms, as though to bid him come to her. And when the white dawn broadened into day, she got up dully, stiffly, with nerveless hands and red eyes, and put the carnations in water on the shelf. One of their heavy buds dropped out, soiling the white calf of a book of quotations that lay there. Mechanically, she took it up and opened it. Quite composedly, she stopped at the page on which, long years ago, at the Court, Edward Serle had scribbled Browning's lines :

" O ! hearts that break ! O ! blood that freezes—blood that burns  
Earth's returns  
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin,  
Shut them in,  
With their triumphs, and their glories, and the rest—  
Love is best ! "

Very slowly her tired eyes followed the familiar writing, and the numb brain made out the meaning of the familiar lines. She must begin her life over again. And with fingers that had lost their feeling, she tore out the page.

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## On French Leave.

By C. HORNBY.

### CHAPTER I.

A cold, damp, white mist enveloped the moor, accompanied by a fine drizzling rain, such as the inhabitants of the moor know well.

The Tors were hidden, the very roadways were obscured utterly; it was all a white blankness—a thick wall of drifting impenetrable wet. A sorry day, truly, for the traveller who was a stranger to the wild, dreary waste. He might strive vainly to escape from that white barrier, to find another way—but in the mist there is no other way.

A puzzle, indeed, it was to Farmer French, although he had been born and bred on the peaty soil, and was now well nigh sixty years. A fine representative he was of the sturdy Devonshire race; tall of stature, broad of build, with a face as rosy as one of his own apples, although his cheeks were furrowed by years of toil and exposure.

"Come, Trix, on with 'ee," he said, in a loud, cheery voice, to the shaggy sheep dog at his heels, and, with a spring, the great beast went forward, and disappeared into the mist like a phantom shadow. "Zakes! but it be thick," he muttered, as he strode on with rapid strides after the dog, "and I be a fule, tew, to get besqueered like this."

Suddenly he stopped, with his stick stuck deep into the soft ground. A faint barking, now louder, now dying away into distance, came to him through the heavy white clouds.

"Sure, and it must be Trix. I reckon there's summat wrong. Trix, Trix, gude dog! Yoop, yoop! where be ye?" Again came the barks, this time more distinct and full of agony. The farmer hurried on to where the sound came from, splashing through the soft bog and tangled grass, across pools of black peat water and prickly gorse bushes. "I be a comin', Trix; hold on, dog," he shouted, as well as his labouring breath would allow.

Then, of a sudden, something dark jumped on him, clutching fiercely at his coat with sharp, eager teeth, and Trix, panting, breath-

less, wild with excitement, dragged him onwards—onwards towards a spot where something—something indistinct—lay at his feet.

"Zakes, man! what be this? A creetur, sure as I live. Gude God, this be a queer start!" Mr. French bent over the prostrate body, while Trix capered about wildly, giving short, sharp barks of eagerness. "One of they tramps lost in the mist. Come, my man, rise'un up, won't se. I baint goin' to stop here all night," and the farmer bestowed a gentle kick on the dark heap, which caused the tramp, if such he was, to turn slowly, emitting a series of grunts as he did so.

"Get out, curse you; can't you let a fellow alone," came in angry accents.

The voice was not that of a common tramp, neither was there any broadness of dialect in it. The tone was that of a gentleman, a man, at least, of education, above that of even a well-to-do farmer. He was evidently wandering in his mind, mistaking French for someone well known to him.

"I ain't a goin' to hurt 'ee, man. Get up, can't 'ee; don't lie there like a gert fule. Get up, I tell 'ee."

With a groan, the miserable man staggered up, clutching on to French as he did so. The good-natured farmer hauled him up, supporting him with a strong arm.

"Come along, man, I'll take 'ee 'ome along o' me. Yoop, yoop, Trix, on with 'ee."

The dog leaped forward at the familiar voice, guiding the two men by his quick, panting breath and short barks. The tramp leant heavily on farmer French's arm, but the old countryman plodded on bravely, until the twinkling light of his homestead loomed through the mist, and the cackling of poultry and the mooing of the oxen welcomed him, safe at last.

"In with 'ee," he said, as the cottage door was thrown open by his wife, a stout, comely dame, with a somewhat anxious expression of face at the late return of her lord.

"Where on earth 'ave 'ee been, John?" she said, crossly, for now that her anxiety was relieved, she could afford to let her feelings exhaust themselves in temper. "Gude Lord! what's this—a tramp you're a bringing in? I never heard tell of sich like doin's," cried the irate dame.

But Mr. French pushed her off with no very gentle hand. "Hold

your tongue, Lizzie. Would 'ee have me leave the poor chap out on the moor this crazy night? Sure enough, 'ee's well nigh dead. Come, man, rouse yesself; none o' your sham. Lizzie, bring some drink along, or 'ee'l be gone this minute."

"It's not old Joe as you've got, is it?" the good woman said, an awed expression crossing her face and blanching it white.

"Ole Joe be d——," cried the farmer, loudly. "Bring some along, quick with 'ee."

Mrs. French hurried off, and soon returned with a mug of hot gin and water. By the time it had been gulped down, and the heat of the peat fire had thawed the frozen limbs, the tramp seemed to recover his senses; he shook himself much as a dog might have done, and glanced vaguely at the farmer and his wife.

"Where am I?" were the first words he spoke. "By George! this is nice," and he leant nearer the roaring blaze; then, as everything appeared to return to him, a shifty, frightened look overspread his dark, haggard face. "Am I safe?" he muttered, huskily.

"Safe, yes! Be 'eeafeared? Sure, though, the mist's enough to scare a body."

The man looked relieved at the words. "The mists? yes!" he shuddered, and drew nearer to the warm glow. "Can I stay here to-night? I was going to Widdicombe, but I'll——"

Mrs. French looked at her husband, but the farmer said, quickly:

"Stay? Of course 'ee may. Think 'ee I'd turn him out on to the moor to-night, eh, wife? He can sleep in the back kitchen, or here, before the fire, whichever he plaize."

"Thank you. I am very much obliged. I—will—" here a violent fit of coughing stopped the stranger's utterance, "I will turn in now, if I may," he went on. "Good God, what a night!" He rose with a shudder, as he spoke.

Mrs. French led the way into the small back kitchen, where the tramp rolled himself up in the hot blankets the good woman deposited near him, and lay down on the broad settle with a deep, weary sigh. Mrs. French returned to the front kitchen with deep misgivings as to the stranger's respectability, and at the same time taking the precaution to turn the key in the lock.

"It's a queer 'un, 'ee is. I wish to gudeness you'd a let him bide, John; 'ee'll bring no gude to the place, I tell 'ee."

Farmer French deigned no answer, but went on eating his bread

and cheese and roast potatoes, with a stolid expression of face. Whatever his own ideas on the subject might have been, he was far too wise to air them in the presence of his spouse, knowing full well the storm of abuse he might well expect once that lady's tongue was loosened.

"I don't know, I ain't afeard o' the likes o' him," he said presently, as he stumped out of the kitchen. "And you needn't take on, Lizzie, 'ee won't hurt 'ee. Come along, Trix," and with that he closed the heavy door behind him.

That night Mrs. French went up to bed with hurried footsteps and uneven breath; somehow, the stranger's appearance had not prepossessed her.

A night's rest, accompanied by warmth and food, does wonders. When the stranger appeared the following morning, and entered the kitchen, both Mr. and Mrs. French looked up from their meal with surprise depicted on their ruddy faces. They saw a tall, gaunt figure, a pale, haggard face, it is true, but, in spite of the clothes, all stained with mud and black peat as they were, it was not the figure nor the face of a tramp that they saw. The figure was upright, broad and powerful, the face a strange one, the features clear cut, but with a curiously sinister expression underlying them; the eyes were dark and almost Eastern in their liquid softness, but at times hardening to a steely glitter; the lean, dark face was quite clean shaven.

"Yo be a sight better, eh?" cried the farmer, as their guest entered.

"Yes, I had a splendid night, thank you."

The words uttered by the soft, low voice, almost oily in its smoothness, were so utterly incongruous, so ridiculous, that people less simple than these good moor folk might have well stared in justifiable surprise. Perhaps they even appealed to the stranger's sense of the ludicrous, for a smile overspread his features as he spoke. The words were well fitted to be uttered by a man who, at a house party, after a hard day's sport, might have come down late for breakfast the next morning, and answered his host's enquiry as to his slumbers.

"The mist be cleared off, tew," continued Farmer French, and in his own mind he was wondering whether he had better attach the "sir" to his sentences in future.

"It certainly has," answered the stranger, "but I was wondering," and here he coughed slightly, "whether you would be so kind as to

continue your hospitality until this evening ; it will be time enough if I start for Widdicombe then ; it is, I believe, only about two miles further on."

" Sartinly, sir, sartinly 'ee can. May be yo'd like to have some tay, if ye'll no mind a sittin' down wi' the likes o' us," old French said, heartily, and moving up on the wooden settle to make more room.

" I may as well tell you at once, my good man, that although I shall be very glad of some food, I have no money to pay you with at present, but I will not forget your kindness, and directly I get——"

The farmer broke in, " It's all right, sir, we bain't afeared o' that. Come, now, Lizzie, pour out some more tay ; and I'll be so bold as to axe if ye'll take some tatties along wi' it ? "

The stranger fell to with a will, and rose half an hour later with his inner man much revived.

As the sun sank beneath the blue hills in the distance, and the crimson glow faded from the low, drifting clouds, leaving the moor dark and grey, the stranger shook hands with Farmer French and his wife, and strode out on to the silent high road, a tall, gaunt, lonely figure, outlined against the sky.

Overhead, the stars peeped out one by one between the clouds ; below, the moor lay like a great mournful plain, broken here and there by the rugged granite tors, watching like sentinels, grim, stern and unrelenting.

The man stood for a moment, motionless, looking up at the slowly-moving clouds, the twinkling stars, the grand old rocky hills, and drew a deep breath. What thoughts passed through his mind, it would be difficult to say.

Few could fail to be impressed by the solemn beauty of the scene. Then this man opened his lips, and spoke in low, hard, vibrating tones ; and his words were strange :

" Good God ! have I been living on earth or in Hell ? "

## CHAPTER II.

A BALMY spring day in Florence ; a day when the sky overhead is one deep cloudless blue, when the dazzling sunshine glints on the slender towers of the Bargello ; of the Pallazzo Vecchio, and on the grand old Duomo ; when the Lung Arno is alive with a gaily-clad

throng of loungers, and the flower boys, with their baskets of roses, sweet-scented stephanotis, anemones, and waving branches of almond blossom, stand at every corner. In the distance, the trees in the Cascino are beginning to bud into a tender green; farther away in the opposite direction are the olive-clad hills of San Miniato and Fiesole, their white villas shining in the sunlight, while the dark, steep sides of the distant Alps make a grand background to the beautiful city.

It is four o'clock on a hot spring afternoon, and the Lung Arno is crowded with carriages, and laughter-loving Florentines, all making for the Cascino, to enjoy the evening promenade, and perhaps get a glimpse of their beloved Prince and his youthful bride.

A handsome English landau, drawn by a pair of prancing thoroughbreds, enters the gate, and is pulled up just inside, while its occupants bend forward to greet two old acquaintances.

"Fancy meeting you here. When did you come?" a girl's voice exclaims, joyously, as she leans out of the carriage.

"Yesterday; we are staying at 'The Washington.' Are you here for long?" returns the young man addressed, while his companion, a grey haired, good-looking man, is answering the elder lady's questions.

"We are at 'The Victoria.' Don't you love Florence? Isn't it interesting?" went on the girl, her pretty face aglow with enthusiasm. "Auntie and I have just come up from Rome, and we are going on to Venice in a fortnight, and from there to the Lakes."

"You are enjoying yourself, Miss Mansell, one can see that," now broke in the older man, with a smile; "but we must not keep you, the horses do not like standing, I can see."

"They are going back to England, when we leave for Venice, poor things. How they must detest the channel, I should think," Lady Lester said, laughing.

"Well, we must be moving on. Ah! there is the Prince of Naples and his bride."

All turned to watch the red-wheeled phaeton, which the young prince was driving himself. By his side sat the handsome Princess Hélène of Montenegro, bowing right and left in her shy, stiff fashion.

"We saw the ceremony in Rome, you know," continued Lady Lester; "it was most impressive and almost mediæval. Poor young thing; what a change in her life! Well, Mr. Norreys, we shall

expect you to-morrow at four-thirty ; and you, too," nodding at the younger man.

Then the carriage drove on, and the two men continued their walk. Every now and then the Lesters' carriage went past in the wake of the others, and Gladys Mansell's pretty, smiling face glanced at them. The last time, however, she was engaged in earnest conversation with a dark, foreign-looking man who occupied the front seat.

Edward Ferris frowned as he watched the intent expression on the young face, and he said, suddenly : "I wonder who that chap is in the Lester's carriage."

Mr. Norreys turned and regarded the individual in question with interest.

" I have seen him before somewhere—let me see. Ah ! I have it, it was at Monte Carlo. Paul Ivanwitch, that's the fellow's name. Jealous, eh, Ferris ? Well ! I would say you had as good chance as anyone."

The young man flushed slightly beneath his sunburnt skin, and a shade of annoyance crossed his face ; but he made no answer, and the Honourable George Norreys chuckled to himself silently.

Eddie Ferris was a good-looking young Englishman, considerably improved in every way by foreign travel, but, like most of his countrymen, he could bear having his mind broadened and his mental sight opened on to a wider horizon. He had had a good deal of the conceit of his Oxford days rubbed off him ; and with his slender, well-knit figure, honest blue eyes, and handsome dark head, he proved a centre of attraction wherever he happened to go.

The next afternoon Ferris and his grey haired friend and fellow-traveller were shown into Lady Lester's sitting-room at the appointed time. It overlooked the Arno, and the French window stood wide open, the roll of carriages and subdued murmur of human life floated inwards through the venetians. Flowers, a few choice water-colours and many photos made the room look homelike and charming, as did the dainty tea-table, with its delicate china and silver accessories.

Lady Lester came forward, a smile of welcome on her handsome face. Miss Mansell rose languidly, and with evident reluctance, from a distant corner of the room, and the man who sat at her elbow followed her slight figure with his eyes, admiringly.

As for Ferris, all the pleasure he had felt in coming had disappeared at the sight of Paul Ivanwitch's sallow, lean visage and

narrow eyes. The two men regarded each other from a distance, with an hostile glance, but the Count lowered his lids nervously after a few seconds, and shifted uneasily in his chair, beneath the gaze of the keen, blue, English eyes.

The tea, on the whole, did not pass off quite so smoothly as it might have done. Ferris was obliged to content himself with the charms of a dark-eyed Italian girl, who, however, could say little but "yes" or "no," while he watched Gladys Mansell from afar. She was sitting well in the shadow of a window curtain, and Paul was bending his dark face and curious eyes towards her.

"And this home of yours," he continued, in his smooth tones, "whereabouts is it? I have never been in your country—your beautiful England; but tell me about it, I am interested, deeply."

"What! you have never been in England, Count? Why, you must come and pay us a visit at Dartmoor, one of these days. Ah! my home is beautiful, and the moor is so grand and wild, I quite long for my rides again, and my dogs; I have had to leave them behind me, poor darlings."

Gladys spoke with a tinge of regret in her voice, and her eyes strayed through the open window, across the Arno, and to the olive-clad hills beyond. She thought of her beloved moor, the silent granite tors, and swift, dark, rushing streams.

"Indeed, Count, you really must come to Dartmoor one of these days; there is much to be seen. Princetown, the prison is quite near us; it would make you shudder to see the wretched prisoners walking in gangs, such dreadful faces some of them have, too, and yet one can hardly help pitying them, poor creatures," continued Gladys, turning her eyes on her companion.

"Oh! Princetown, you live near, and you pity them—you actually feel pity for such wretches, Miss Mansell?" questioned the Count, appearing to find the pattern of the carpet interesting, for his eyes were fixed upon it.

"No, not at all, no, indeed; some of the prisoners look dreadful, so hardened and bad. Oh! we won't talk about it," she said; "you have never seen them, so you cannot understand my feeling, I dare-say."

"No, I have never seen them," echoed the Count.

"Let me introduce you to a friend of mine, Count," Gladys Mansell said, presently; she beckoned to Ferris across the room; he came

at once, only too willingly, with a reproachful expression in his eyes.

"I want to introduce you two; Count Ivanwitch—Mr. Ferris." Both men bowed, the one with the usual foreign politeness, the other slightly and coldly. "Now I am going to help auntie with the tea, so you must both make yourselves very agreeable to each other," the girl said with a laugh, as she moved away.

Both men stood awkwardly silent, and both pairs of eyes watched the slim, grey clad form as it flitted from one guest to another.

"What the deuce has she done this for?" the Englishman thought, angrily.

"A veritable English prig," reflected the foreigner.

"Charming, charming; a sweet young lady, eh?" drawled the Count at last, for the silence was becoming awkward. His narrow, dark eyes avoided meeting his companion's, and he stroked his black moustache meditatively.

"Very," replied Ferris, stiffly. "You have known the Lesters some time, I believe?"

"Ah! no, not long enough. I am a great admirer of English beauty, although I have never had the good fortune to go to that country."

"Indeed?"

"It must be a beautiful country, so cultivated, so—so--ah! my dear sir, you understand; I have difficulty in expressing myself in adequate terms."

"I should hardly have thought that.. By the way, you were at Monte Carlo last month, I think; I remember your face."

Ferris eyed the other keenly as he spoke, and saw the careless expression of *sangfroid* change in a remarkably short space of time to one of covert suspicion.

"I was, sir; but I have not the pleasure of remembering you; you have quick eyes, perhaps?"

"Yes, I have, luckily for me. Well! I can't stay here wasting my time any longer; good afternoon."

For some minutes the Count stood motionless, an expression of vindictive cruelty on his dark, lean face, which was not pleasant to contemplate.

"Oh, oh! my fine friend," he muttered, between his teeth, "we shall see, we shall see," and then he turned and sauntered, with his

languid, nonchalant air, towards his hostess, his features set immovably in their usual polite society smile.

As for Ferris, he burst in upon Mr. Norreys, who was partaking of a quiet cup of tea, in the society of a pretty, fascinating widow, with anything but becoming consideration.

"I say," he said, abruptly, "I'm off; shall see you later on, I daresay."

He took leave of his hostesses, and was soon striding down the Lung Arno, his face set, his eyes gleaming angrily.

"The low cad," he muttered, as he strode along, much to the astonishment of the passers-by. "I wonder what he's up to, to no good, I'll be bound. By Jove; where have I seen him before? It wasn't Monica."

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### CHAPTER III.

CARRIAGE after carriage rolled through the old archway of the Palazzo Grimani, and set down its fair occupants at the wide open entrance door. From within a glimpse of light palms and flags were to be seen. The grand stone staircase was carpetted in crimson, and guest after guest made their way to the great suite of rooms above.

Like many of the Italian nobility the Grimani were not rich, and only occupied one floor of the grand old Palazzo; but it was amply sufficient; and room after room with the lofty frescoed ceiling and tapestry hung walls, opened one into the other. The sound of music drifted down to the narrow street below, for the dancing had begun, and the huge rooms were filling rapidly.

Eddie Ferris, who found it singularly easy to obtain introductions, wherever he wished to go, stood against the doorway, scanning the guests with indifferent eyes as they streamed in. Dark eyed, dusky haired beauties, passed him unnoticed; fairhaired, laughing, gay Americans, failed to interest him.

The Princess of Naples just then passed in, the crowd opening for her, her tall slender figure robed in gleaming satin, studded with diamonds.

The next moment Eddie Ferris started forward eagerly, thrust his way through the throng, and was begging Gladys Mansell for a dance; she looked very lovely in her simple white dress of some soft

silky texture, with some real flowers nestling amongst the filmy lace, very different indeed to the lavishly dressed and thickly powdered daughters of Italy.

"What! only two?" Eddie exclaimed ruthfully, gazing into her grey eyes reproachfully. "I don't want to dance with anyone else here to-night, unless Lady Lester favours me. Ah!" he broke off hurriedly, and with a slight bow, moved away.

Count Ivanwitch had approached, looking almost handsome in his irreproachable evening dress; he came up to Gladys at once. "Ah! our dance, the first I have had with you Miss Mansell," he said in his smooth tones, and they whirled away, mingling with the rest, on the polished floor. Ferris watched them from where he stood, and then in duty bound, made his way to the daughter of his hostess. It was not until late in the evening that he could claim his dance with Gladys; he found her sitting on a low lounge, the count fanning her, and gazing with passionate eyes into hers.

Neither looked over-pleased at Ferris's sudden arrival, but the young man walked sternly up to them, and without a word offered the girl his arm. Gladys took it, a slightly annoyed expression passing over her face, and her cheeks flushing.

"Really, Mr. Ferris, you need not try to annihilate poor Count Ivanwitch altogether; he can hardly have a very good idea of English manners, or," with a slight curl of her lip, "English men."

"I don't care a hang, what the Count thinks; I can't understand how you can put up with such a mamby pamby, greasy foreigner—Pah! the fellow makes me absolutely sick."

"He does not affect me in that way," retorted Miss Mansell coldly; then, with a sudden smile, "really, Eddie, you are too ridiculous."

The familiar name, the frank upward glance of the grey eyes, had the effect of banishing all signs of the young man's ill humour.

"I wish you wouldn't have him hanging about," he said, when they were comfortably installed in a corner of the great music room.

"Don't be rude; besides, he does not hang about, as you call it, and I am sure he means to be very charming. I shall get mother to ask him to stay with us in the summer."

"What?" Ferris felt all his anger returning post haste, at the words, "you won't Gladys, why he'd faint on a horse and tumble off at the first hedge."

"Would he? I am not sure of that; anyhow, he could sketch and accompany me out walking."

She spoke with a mischievous desire to tease, but she was hardly prepared for the storm that followed.

"I never thought you would take up with a sickly miserable specimen of humanity of that sort. Well! all girls are the same I suppose; they snap at a title and grasp at a novelty, but good Heavens! I thought you were above the usual run;" his eyes flashed, his tone grew bitter.

"You shall not insult me, Mr. Ferris. Oh! why will you be so absurd;" she looked at him, a smile in her eyes, a sound of laughter in her voice; but the young man broke in angrily:

"Oh! very well, call me absurd if you will, perhaps I am, but whatever I am, I love you Gladys, and I have always, ever since I first saw you on the moor three years ago; but of course my love is nothing to you now. There is the music, shall we go?" They both rose, but the girl's face was a trifle paler, and her lips were not quite steady; she did not dance again with Ferris that evening, because he never claimed his second waltz, and she was far too proud to seek him, but somehow, during the rest of the evening the Count's soft, honeyed accents fell on unheeding ears; unknowingly she compared the two men, the one frank, blue-eyed and manly, the other shifty, sallow, and with only the good looks that outward polish gives.

No! Gladys decided in her own mind that the ball had been a very great failure, and she was not sorry when Lady Lester gave the signal for departure.

She sat silent during the homeward drive, in spite of her aunt's torrent of conversation, that rippled on unceasingly, about various events of the evening.

Her thoughts strayed to her home, to her horses and her dogs, and the delicious free open-air life that she loved, but which she thought she had grown tired of.

Venice and the lakes had to be got through, and there would be no possibility of returning home for at least two months to come; she thought of Eddie and his ridiculous jealousy; after all he had no right to talk as he did; she was free to choose her own acquaintances without his approval. No! she would not snub the Count, as she had intended doing; after all, poor man, he meant to be agreeable, and

if he loved her, well—why shouldn't he? Surely he could not help it, if his affection ran away with him.

The next few days were spent almost exclusively in sight-seeing. Count Ivanwitch displayed a wonderful knowledge of the old masters, and was a most efficient guide.

Ferris held severely aloof; once Gladys met him at the English library, where she had gone to change some books, but he passed, merely lifting his hat, and favouring her with a smileless bow. This did not tend to put Miss Mansell in a particularly pleasant temper, and she walked into her aunt's room at the hotel, feeling out of tune and as though something had gone wrong.

"I have just had a note from Mr. Ferris saying he cannot manage to come in to tea this afternoon," said Lady Lester, unknowingly adding the finishing touch to Gladys' wrath.

"Oh! can't he? Well—I am sure we can do without him. I suppose Count Ivanwitch will come," and Gladys began looking through the library books, apparently quite unconcerned.

Lady Lester was completely deceived.

"Oh! yes—such a charming man, dear; so interesting, and I am sure quite—er—devoted to a certain young woman of my acquaintance." Her ladyship smiled knowingly, but Gladys went to her room with big tears filling her pretty eyes.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

FOUR months had passed, and June had given place to July—hot, cloudless, dusty month—not dusty on the moor, however, but fresh and sweet, the air full of the scent of clover and newly-gathered hay.

Gladys sat somewhat pensively on a huge granite boulder on the hill-side, the purple heather at her feet, the gentle breeze fanning her.

Lying at full length beside her, plucking at the grass nervously, was Count Ivanwitch. He did not look the picture of happiness, in spite of the fact that his lady love was so near; the muscles round his mouth were working convulsively, his eyes shifted uneasily.

Just behind the bend of the hill was Farmer French's cottage; the blue smoke curled upwards, and the cackling of the poultry could be heard on the still air.

No! for some reason or other, the Count was ill at ease. True, he had come down to Dartmoor with the express purpose of offering himself to Gladys, but as yet he had not plucked up courage to put the great question, and to-day, at that very moment, perhaps, Eddie Ferris was to arrive for a fortnight's visit, and in two or three days the Count's time would be up.

"Your friend Ferris—is not that his name?—will be here soon." the Count said at last, more for the sake of saying something than anything else. "Rather a bore—do you not say bore?—for you, I should think; such a heavy young man, and so extremely *gauche*."

"Indeed, he is not! Mr. Ferris is a great friend of ours, Count Ivanwitch. I am afraid you do not care for him much." Gladys spoke sharply; she would not hear anything against Eddie, and the colour in her delicate face grew slightly deeper.

"Ah, no! but then we are different, 'chalk and cheese,' do you not say? I care not for sports, nor the shooting of harmless birds and rabbits."

"Different! I should think so," cried Miss Mansell, indignantly, "and I am sure you are the last one to talk of shooting harmless birds; what about those wretched sparrows in Italy, that you used to shoot with a thing like a toy pop-gun?"

"But that was not often, and in Rome we do as the Romans do, and here, Miss Mansell, I will willingly shoot anything you command me to," the Count said, gallantly; but Gladys did not look pleased. She rose, abruptly, saying:

"I am sure I would not be so heartless as to wish *you* to shoot anything—besides, you might kill someone by mistake. Come, I am going to visit Mr. French."

"French?" The Count allowed the insult to pass unheeded, an ashen shade spread over his face; his breathing was a little uneven.

"Yes. Have you any objection?" retorted the girl, walking briskly forward.

The Count forced himself to follow her, but his knees trembled beneath him.

Gladys turned round impatiently; she felt decidedly out of temper with herself and her companion. "Why, what is the matter? You look quite ill," she exclaimed, for she could hardly fail to notice his deadly pallor.

"Nothing. I am quite well, Miss Mansell. I—I—"

"Well, come along, then."

In less than ten minutes they stood on the threshold of Farmer French's dwelling, and the man shuddered violently, as he looked at the long, low farmhouse, with its many out-buildings.

Mrs. French, rosy-faced and comely, bustled forward, dusting a chair with her apron for the young lady from the hall.

"Well, Miss ! I be glad to see 'ee back agen," came in Farmer French's deep bass, as his hulking form now appeared behind that of his spouse, his red face aglow with honest pleasure, his horny hand outstretched.

"Yes, we are back again," Gladys said, smiling brightly, "and very happy I am to be at home, Mr. French. This is a gentleman staying with us. May we sit down for a few moments?"

"Sit 'ee down, sit 'ee down, to be sure; us be proud to see 'ee here, an' the gentleman tew."

But the Count did not seem particularly eager to avail himself of the invitation ; he hung back, his face so absolutely ghastly that Mrs. French pushed forward a chair hastily.

"Why, gude Lard save us!" ejaculated the good woman, her blue eyes wide, and her mouth open, "gude Lard save us, John, if it ain't 'im. Oh, sakes alive!"

Mrs. French sank back on the wooden settle, gasping, her face changing from red to white.

"Why! what on earth——" Gladys broke off, staring helplessly from one to the other. Then the little kitchen witnessed a strange scene.

Farmer French made one lurch forward, his great hands seizing the well-gloved, slender ones of the Count. His rough, honest face grew purple with suppressed passion and excitement.

"I don't mean no offence towards you, Miss Gladys, but I baint a goin' to let 'im away a second time."

The Count made an effort to wrench away his hands.

"No, sir, not a second time. I baint no fule now; I know 'ee well enough."

No words passed the Count's bloodless lips; he only stood motionless, his features working, his panting breath very audible.

As for Gladys, her grey eyes grew larger and larger with amazement and wonder. "I don't understand, Mr. French. What do you mean? Let this gentleman alone; you are insulting him. He is

staying with us," she burst out; but the farmer's grasp did not relax, and he smiled grimly.

"I don't know nothin' of that, Miss, but I baint a goin to let un be. He's a convict up to Princetown, that's what he be, and I baint a goin' to let un go." He pulled the wretched man along as he spoke, and pushed him roughly down on to a wooden chair in the corner of the kitchen.

"Yes, Miss, it's quite true," now broke in Mrs. French, who had partially recovered. "Just yo' listen, and I'll tell 'ee of un. A twelvemonth agarn, my John 'ee find un out on the moor, and brought un in near dead like. 'Ee axed us, 'ee did, if he might stop along o' us for the night, an' the next evenin' 'ee was garn. 'Ee 'adn't bin garn a day, Miss, when two plicemen come along, an' they tell us that a convict 'ad run away in the mist—an' that's 'im there, as sure as I know." Mrs. French shook her fist furiously at the now abject individual in the corner. "I know as 'ee's a convict, Miss Gladys, but I doant know nothin' else of un," added Mrs. French. "'Ee may be a gentleman along o' you, Miss, at the big house, but 'ee's a convict, an' I baint tellin' but the truth, Miss Gladys."

Poor Gladys! what could she say—what could she do? She only stared blankly from Farmer French's rubicund visage to the ghastly white one of the Count. "Why don't you say something?" she cried, and her voice shook a little.

"Say? Why, I'll have the police on you all, that's what I'll say," cried the Count, suddenly jumping up and clenching his fist furiously. "It's all a lie—a damned lie, from beginning to end, and I believe you brought me here oh purpose," stormed the man, his face livid with passion, every trace of foreign accent gone from his speech. "Deny it! of course I deny it. How dare you insult me like this, by Jove! I'll have the police down on you all."

"Don't 'ee take on so, my man; I'll reckon you'll see they afore we do. Now then, Miss Gladys, yo'd a better be gettin' home; us'll keep un till the squire comes to settle the job."

And Gladys went; she flew over the wide stretch of moorland as fast as her feet could carry her. Could it be true? What did it mean? Why had such a sudden change taken place in the Count? Why had he ever dared to show himself on Dartmoor—or even in England, if, indeed, he was as Farmer French asserted him to be? Why did he call himself Count? Who was he? All these thoughts

flew through her brain as she sped homewards. She rushed into the library, where her father was generally to be found, but he was not there. Eddie Ferris stood near the window, rolling a cigarette between his fingers, a gloomy expression on his face.

"Oh! Eddie, is that you?" burst out the girl, hysterically. "Something dreadful has happened; the Count——" Her panting breath choked her; she sank down, trembling, on a chair.

"What the deuce—why, Gladys, what has happened, is he killed?" The young man faced her, his blue eyes full of enquiry.

"No, no! but he is—Oh! I can't tell you; where is father?"

She got up and moved blindly towards the door, but Ferris, with one stride, barred the way. "Tell me," he said, authoritatively. "I must know, Gladys."

"We were on the moor. Farmer French—his cottage—he is there. He—is—Farmer French says he is a convict." She brought out the word with a little gasp, and looked up appealingly.

"What—what are you saying?" cried Ferris, almost roughly.

"Oh, I can't understand; I am sure I can't explain. Why, Eddie, what's the matter? Do you know anything?"

"Know anything? of course I do. Good God! I knew I had seen the man before that time at Monica, and now I know where it was. Ah! here is your father."

"Oh, dad!" cried Gladys, piteously, as she rushed up to him. "Eddie, do explain."

In as few words as possible, and with Gladys' help, the squire was soon in possession of the facts of the case. In less than half an hour he and Ferris were at French's cottage, where a struggle of some sort was evidently going on.

"Hold on, yer gert fule, 'ere be the squire—quiet, will 'ee?"

The Count, for no one knew what his real name was, stood in the centre of the kitchen, his face convulsed with rage, his eyes gleaming wildly; near him stood the burly Devonshire man, his big hands fastened with a vice-like grip on the light tweed sleeve of the other. As the squire and Ferris entered, the Count, with a sudden, cat-like spring, tried to dash past them, but it was a useless trial for freedom.

Ferris quickly stepped before the door, with a quiet "Oh! you would, would you?"

"Now then, explain this, if you please," Mr. Mansell said, sternly,

"and you, French, on what authority do you insult my guest in this way?"

"I know 'im, squire, he's the creetur what run away twelve month agarn, as us 'ave telled Miss Gladys. Call himself a Count, do 'ee. Hah ! hah !" French laughed, unpleasantly. "I tell 'ee, he be a scoundrel, an' I reckon as the gents up to the prison would tell 'ee the same."

"Very well, it shall be proved. Now, look here my friend," went on the squire, striding up to the Count as he spoke, "It is not a pleasant thing for me to have one of my guests taken up as an escaped convict, and I tell you plainly I am willing to give you every chance. Ferris, here, says he can vouch for you, because he now remembers seeing you at the station at Newton Abbot, about the time of your escape. None of your subterfuges will go down with me ; I am asking you a plain question, and I expect a plain answer : are you Count Ivanwitch or not ?"

"What the devil does it matter to you who I am ? Get out of my way, or I'll dash your brains out," stormed the man, savagely, making a step forward, but the farmer was by his side, and Ferris not far off.

"You scoundrel," the squire said, in a hoarse, low tone, "and you dared—dared to worm your way into our house—you *dared* to ?"

"Yes ! I dared, and if it had not been for this d——d brute, I'd have married your daughter, and had her fortune, too."

The man who called himself a count was quite beside himself now he knew well enough that there was but little chance for him—that he had gone the length of his rope.

"French!" Squire Mansell spoke in a loud, stern tone, "send one of your men up to Princetown now, at once, and tell him to bring a constable and two warders back with him. Now then, sir, stand back, if you please. No ! don't let me hear your vile tongue again."

The squire strode to the door, and drew a deep breath, as he looked at the peaceful country scene. Ferris looked from the window, his blue eyes very stern.

The convict sat on the wooden settle, his face livid and full of a deep savage hatred, that was not pleasant to behold. For one long solitary hour the three men waited. Mrs. French had taken herself off upstairs, as she refused to stay in the presence of a convict.

Soon the tramp of feet told them that the waiting was at an end. A sergeant and two warders entered the kitchen ; they touched

their hats respectfully to the squire, and stood quietly awaiting orders.

"Now then, sergeant, do you know this man or not?"

"Yes, sir, he is Nicholas Bridgenorth, taken up first for forgery, let out at the end of his time, and taken up again for robbery. He escaped twelve months ago, and here he is, sure enough." The words were uttered in a sharp, business-like tone, with just a touch of malice. Evidently Nicholas Bridgenorth was a troublesome character.

"Very well, you can arrest him, sergeant, and take him back to where he belongs. Luckily, we have plenty of witnesses, should any trouble arise. That will do."

Nicholas Bridgnorth was instantly handcuffed, and stood between the two stalwart warders, and was soon marching towards the grim, grey walls, which were only too familiar to him.

That was the last that Ferris ever saw of his rival. The man who had so successfully duped foreign society for the last year—who was not only a Londoner born and bred, but a professional gambler into the bargain, with the outward aspect of a gentleman, it is true, and welcomed by society for nearly ten years of his life, was now safely lodged in Princetown gaol for the rest of his existence.

One thought was uppermost in the minds of both father and lover, as they strode homewards—"How will Gladys take it? What will she say?"

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## CHAPTER V.

It was two months later; summer had deepened into autumn, and the rugged hillsides were brilliant with pink heather and yellow gorse. Below in the valleys the russet browns of the orchards mingled with the red gold of the beeches and oaks. The mountain ash berries made a bright spot of colour on the hedges, but the fallen leaves spoke sadly of the coming winter.

Gladys climed the steep hill from the village on to the moor, wearily, the dogs at her heels. In spite of her parents' persuasions she had refused resolutely to leave her home; she did not require a change of scene again she argued, she had but just come home and declared she never wanted to go abroad again. Indeed those last few months on the continent seemed like a dream; night after night

she would lie awake thinking over the events of the last few months ; she had been thoroughly deceived, duped, wholly and solely.

Why had she not listened to Eddie in Florence ? No ! she had been blind, misled by outward appearances ; she shuddered when she thought of what she had escaped.

Ferris had departed soon after Count Ivanwitch had been taken, and had not returned. Now why had he not returned ? this was the question that tortured Gladys.

Perhaps after all he had ceased to care for her, if so, why then—

“Hello !”

Someone came suddenly round the corner, causing the dogs to set up a chorus of yelping barks ; then had stopped short with the very ordinary exclamation of surprise on his lips.

“Eddie !”

“Why ! I thought you had gone to Como or one of those foreign places,” was the hurried rejoinder ; “I am staying at Box Tor Farm for the pheasant shooting with some fellows.”

“No ! we didn’t go away after all ; you ought to have come to us Eddie. Father I am sure —”

“I shouldn’t think of intruding myself so soon again ; why I only left here two months ago. Gladys, how ill you look,” and the young man eyed her keenly.

“I am not ill—I—” she hesitated and flushed deeply, turning her eyes to where the moor rolled away, until it was lost in banks of purple clouds and haze.

“Of course, I understand, I beg your pardon, it must be——” he stopped awkwardly, his honest blue eyes troubled.

Gladys stood speechless ; no words came to her. How could she help it if he misunderstood her ; how could she explain ?

“I shall call if I may ? perhaps you are going for a walk ? I won’t keep you.”

He lifted his hat, and flicked the dust with his stick, then moved away.

“Oh ! Eddie——” such a despairing little voice it was—so faint, it seemed quite impossible he could hear it, but Ferris turned like a shot—and with one stride was at her side.

“Gladys—do—you—want me ?”

“Not if you look like that I don’t,” she replied, a slight tremulous smile hovering round her lips.

"I thought you did not care," he went on hurriedly, "I thought you liked him—I mean—once—in Italy; did you dear?"

"Oh! no, no, it was only my horrible way of teasing you. Eddie I am ever so sorry now, I am really."

"Are you?" he said, staring at her intently. "Does that mean you love me Gladys? are—are you sure it does?"

"Yes! quite—quite sure Eddie," was the soft answer. "I loved you in Florence; I loved you always. Oh! I do, I do."

What would have happened then must be left to the imagination, for the very good reason that just as the last words were uttered, a tall stout figure stumbled suddenly round the bend of the road, and good Farmer French appeared on the scene.

"Well! sir, gude day to 'ee and to Miss Gladys tew. A fine marin', sir."

Perhaps the farmer was not quite so dense as one might have thought, for there was a scarcely perceptible twinkle in his eye.

"I say, French, what do you think?"

"Oh! Eddie," came in an agonized whisper from Gladys, as she read the unrelenting determination in her lover's eye, but Ferris laughed delightedly.

"Mr. French I want you to congratulate me, and to wish all happiness to this young lady, who has promised to be my wife."

"Well! sir, now to be sure, this be a proud day for me, and to think I should be the first to 'ave heard," cried the good man, his twinkle broadening into one big smile.

"Yes, indeed, and we have to thank Mr. French for our happiness, Gladys, as far as I can see," he went on more gravely.

"That's all right, sir," said the old man, "Let bygones be bygones, as my Lizzie says, an' I'm sure I 'ope both will be as happy as us has been all our lives, an' I cannot wish 'ee better'n that," and with a cheery "gude day to 'ee," Farmer French, went on his way, leaving Gladys and Ferris standing hand in hand on the edge of the purple moor.

## **Forgotten Melodies.**

By GERALD HAYWARD.

IN reading Vernon Lee's "Juvenilia" the other day, we were much struck by the quaint and somewhat weird idea of the author on forgotten melodies. She says, "Our mind proves unable to conceive of all those thousands and thousands of combinations of notes which were heard once upon a time, and are now heard no longer. They have ceased to exist along with the recollection of the men and women in whose mind they had their sole real existence." Here, music seems to assume a distinct personality. It is woven in with the lives and thoughts of the men and women who heard it. They have passed into the great unknown land, and the tuneful melodies which sobbed and sang in pleasing rhythm or mournful cadence have gone also. It is a curious thought this. Strange that many an air which haunted human hearts like a presence, as we know airs will, should pass away and be forgotten. Strange that melodies which perhaps set the heart throbbing with joy, and made the lips break forth into song, should have had their day and ceased to be. We wander sometimes in some old neglected churchyard, and there, amid the nettles and weeds, the dearth and the dreariness, we come upon a tombstone half-hidden by the rank undergrowth, upon which can scarcely be deciphered a name and date. A stone no more. Yet it marks the last resting-place of someone who was a living, breathing reality, who had a heart to love, and a brain to think, who passed his life in shadow and shine, then passed away and was forgotten, and his place knew him no more. So many an old melody. It sang its little song, it lived for a while in a few hearts, then vanished like the summer mist. Where? Perhaps they still sing on in some distant sphere, or new condition of existence who knows? Perhaps, too, they will reawaken and blossom forth in the hearts that have grown cold, but which will be young once more at the restoration of all things.

But apart from the knowledge that many an old melody has passed away for ever, and many a sweet strain ceased to be, how many compositions there are whose names are well known to any student of musical history, but whose melody and charm are mute, silent and

unknown. The Mass, for instance, which Palestrina wrote in the sixteenth century, to vindicate the honour of musicians, and to clear church music from the frivolity and weakness which were beginning to cling round it like a parasite. This must have been a noble composition, for the College of Cardinals assembled in solemn conclave, unanimously hailed it as good, and the worthy example of what church music should be. Yet how many people know the name, much less the melody of the "Missa Papæ Marcelli?" Or, again, in the romantic story of Stradella, the musician of the seventeenth century, hunted as he was over Europe by banditti who sought his life; that surely is the most pathetic part of the story, when, having traced him to a church where he was singing a solo, the hearts of those savage assassins were melted by the beautiful voice of the singer, and won by the sweet melody he sang, to such an extent that they who had come to kill, remained to pray. Yet, who has heard the melody which tamed savage hearts and subdued cruel minds? Its tender cadences must have fallen like a soft solace on the hearts of those banditti. Can such a strain have for ever passed into the unknown? Or again, who is there we come across, who has heard the music of Alleighri's "Miserere," deemed so sacred that no pen was allowed to take it down, and never heard beyond the confines of the Sistine chapel. Yet Mozart listens one day, and by the force of his genius and power, takes the sacred composition down note for note as it is being performed. Yet few are familiar with its name, much less its music.

Or, to come to musicians and compositions of our own land. Those "Ayres for Single Voices," written by Henry Lawes in the seventeenth century, must have been sung by many a pleasing voice, and no doubt gave solace and joy to many a tender heart. Yet beyond the few examples given in Hullah's well known "History of Music," we know but little of them. And yet he was a good musician, for it was him of whom the poet Milton wrote in the lines:—

"Harry, whose tuneful and well measured song,  
First taught our English music how to span  
Words with just note and accent, not to scan  
With Midas ears, conjointly short and long "

Or, John Dowland again, termed by some the Father of English Music, has passed away and is forgotten. Yet we know he wrote

much music, known and loved in his day. We judge that it was sweet and true, on account of Shakespeare's words about him:—

"If music and sweet poetry agree,  
As needs they must, the sister and the brother,  
Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me  
Because thou lovest the one and I the other."

John Jenkins again, about whom Roger North, in his "Memories of Music," says, that "for nearly half a century, the private music in England was in great measure supplied by him." He must have been as well known in his day as Sullivan is in ours. His melodies must have been sung by many a voice, and lightened many a heart, yet who has heard them now? With the exception of the few revived by musical antiquaries, the majority have passed to the land of forgotten things. Old Christopher Tye also, that musical martinet, who, when Elizabeth in her Royal Chapel of Windsor, hearing him play the organ, said he was playing out of tune, promptly replied that her ears were out of tune. He, we read, composed a great deal of English Church music, much of which is lost. We can imagine how often the full-voiced choir in stately fane and ancient Cathedral would sing his compositions, and how the sound of the quaint old melodies would linger round the fretted vault and delicate tracery of many a noble building. Alas! they are all gone, and like their master, passed to eternal rest.

And many more compositions could be mentioned whose melodies are things of the past, and their existence forgotten. Truly, there is something pathetic in this host of forgotten melodies, because they remind us of the long ago, which is no more, of hands that are still, and hearts that are cold.

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## The Dolphin.

By L. WARD.

"WHY don't you write novels like this woman does?" said Mr. Freeman, impatiently; instead of those stupid stories for children which bring you in nothing, or next to nothing—she gets *hundreds* and *hundreds* for *this*, and really there is nothing in it." And the invalid somewhat viciously threw on one side the popular novel he had just finished reading.

"My dear Fred!" answered his wife; and for a moment the soft brown eyes left the needlework, and gave him an amused smile; "how could I, with all the needlework—and baby—and John's lessons—and the cooking?"

"You should let Bridget do the cooking," grumbled her lord.

"So she does, for us—Bridget's awfully good and hardworking, but she cannot do everything, and I am sure you would not like her jelly and beef tea," was the answer.

"It is a pity I can't do without these things, I know," and with martyr-like resignation, he added: "I would if I could."

"Now, my dear Hub! you know it is a pleasure to make them. I only meant to say that one wants more time than I have for writing novels—even if I had the ability," she added.

"It is wonderful how some people can *make* time," was the invalid's next remark.

"I only wish I knew the way to manufacture that useful commodity," was her answer, and her needle clicked rather more quickly, and there was a slight contraction of the white brow; "but I shall have rather more time now that our dear Marjory has gone away to school."

"What on earth is that garment, which seems to engross your whole attention?" he queried, querulously, for he liked to have her whole attention when he was not dozing or reading.

"This?" she said, laughingly, holding up her work for his inspection. "Hush, don't speak of it—it is work which has been done with utmost secrecy," and the pleasant, low voice became lower still, as she added: "Marjory's serge frock has been converted into

a pair of knicks for Allan ; but boys are such creatures, that if he knew of the transmigration, he would think it degrading to wear them. Don't they look nice ? " and she held up the garment, and viewed it with triumphant affection.

" You are not forgetting my medicine, Ella, in your enthusiasm over those trousers, I hope ? "

" No, dear, it is just time for it," she answered, cheerfully folding the garment and putting it out of sight. The smile on her careworn face was soon chased away and gave place to lines round mouth, and furrowing of brow, as she nerved herself to say : " Fred, I don't want to worry you, but the boys really must have new clothes before next term ; they cannot possibly go back to school in what they are *now* wearing."

" Then they must go without—I've no money for more."

" Neither the laws of the country or the climate would allow them to do that, you know, Fred," she answered, with a nervous laugh.

" Well ! I shall have no more money on my account by the time I've paid for the refrigerator."

" Then better not get the refrigerator," said Mrs. Freeman, decidedly. " Our boys must be clothed," and the furrows in her forehead showed very plainly now, for the battle of clothes was always a severe one for her to fight, but she fought it as tenderly as she could with her suffering mate.

" Always the same—boys first, and the wretched invalid must go to the wall, I suppose ; *his* wants and comforts are of very small importance—" but a violent fit of coughing put an end to further comment from him, and it brought the harrassed wife quickly to his side. She was filled with remorse as she looked at the convulsed face, and remembered the doctor's warning : " You must keep him free from all excitement and worry."

" Poor, poor fellow ! It is hard he should be worried by these matters ! Yes ! I certainly will try and write something to help things on," she determined, " for the boys must be clothed."

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Good, faithful Bridget ! Her duties were getting quite complicated ; it used to be, " Your Pa must be kept quiet, Master John ; " but now it was, " Your Pa *and* your Ma," for Mrs. Freeman had (during the hours her lord slept or did not require her) taken up her pen and wielded it (thanks to Bridget, who, while doing the

housework, minded the baby and kept a vigilant eye on the irrepressible John) with as little interruption as was possible under the circumstances.

"I haven't an idea in my head," sighed Mrs. Freeman, as she seated herself at the writing table, and her brow contracted until there were two quite deep cuts in the white forehead, "but I can't sit here and wait for inspiration—I must begin," and she took up her pen with determination. At first the slender fingers moved but slowly, then quicker and quicker, and the comely head was bent intently now over the paper as it had been a day or two before over the small, ingenious garment for her boy. She became so engrossed that she never heard the gentle tapping at her door which had been repeated more than once.

It was not until Bridget stood at her elbow, and said in a loud, impressive whisper, "It biles, mum," that she extricated herself from the love scene she was vividly picturing, and turned with somewhat vacant mind and look to Bridget, as she reiterated in a far-off voice :

"It boils?"

"Yes, mum, it's just come to the bile, and's a simmering beautiful."

"Oh, Bridget, I wish you had not disturbed me," was somewhat pettishly said.

"Nor more I wouldn't, mum; only you *told* me to be sure and come," was the aggrieved answer.

"Oh! so I did, Bridget, thank you," and the smile she gave quite mollified the injured Bridget.

"I will come in a few minutes," she added—for she must see it out with her lovers. Mrs. Freeman found it no easy matter to catch those lovers again; they had receded in the far distance, but after a while she overtook them, and was moulding them again to her liking, when the gentle tapping came again.

"Good gracious, Bridget, *what* is it?" she asked without looking round; and there was no doubt about the pettishness this time.

"It's only me, mummy dear," came softly from a sturdy, golden-headed boy of six, who began creeping in on tip-toe, but ended by a joyous bound, which brought the merry face close by his mother's, when a mutual kiss was the result. "Bridget said I mustn't come,

mummy, but I *knew* I *must*, when this cum'd off," and the dirty little hand opened, and shewed a button.

"Yes, darling," answered the mother—for to whom on earth should he go to with his troubles if not to her.

"Yes, mummy," he said, "I knew you'd want me to come," and he patted her careworn face with hands not too clean, as she knelt down to sew on the button. "Oh, poor mummy!" tracing the dents in her forehead with his soft finger, "when did you get these cuts?"

"Oh, a long time ago, I think; but they're not cuts, John."

"Do they hurt?"

"No, darling."

"But didn't they hurt you when they cum'd, mummy?" and the silvery voice was full of concern.

"I don't *think* so, darling," she said, with hesitation. For had they not hurt! as Time, with no gentle hand, had chiselled those cuts deeper and deeper into the careworn face, while the fourteen years of her troubled married life had rolled on. Who shall say if in the coming they had not hurt her very much? She had nursed, with untiring zeal, the unsympathetic invalid, whose whole interest was vested in himself; and had shielded him from the privation and worries which she was forced to bear alone, and bore so bravely. "If I marry him," she said, fourteen years ago, "I will try and be a perfect wife!" This meritorious resolution was made when her heart sailed away to Australia with her first lover.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, Fred," said Mrs. Freeman, and her eyes sparkled with excitement, which she tried in vain to subdue, "I am thankful to think that my poor little story should be worth such a sum," and she glanced with rapture at the cheque which she held in her hand. "It was the love scene that did it"—*this* she said to herself.

"What magazine took it?" asked Mr. Freeman.

"Why, 'The Dolphin,'" she answered.

"What made you send it there?" was his next question.

"I don't exactly know," and the colour came to her face. "I had to send it *somewhere*, so I went to the library and had a good look at all the magazines, and then chose 'The Dolphin'."

"Who is the editor?" was the next question.

"Oh!" she answered, evasively, "he only says in his note,

"the Editor.'" and she somewhat hurriedly put away the cheque and began to polish the medicine glasses. For had not the *name* of the editor been the sole reason why she decided upon sending her precious MS. to "The Dolphin." "Carl Burton!—it could not, of course, be he," she said to herself, "for I never heard that he had returned from Australia—besides, it is not an uncommon name." But she was glad to come across the old familiar name, and when she had found it, she did not hunt further for a more suitable magazine.

"Well, dear, you can have the refrigerator at once," and Mrs. Freeman stooped to kiss her husband.

"Not for me, kind, good wifie," and he looked tenderly at her, as he held her hand in his, "not for me!"

"He seems much worse, Bridget," and her eyes were full of tears, as she wrote out a telegram for the refrigerator.

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"Then you took them all," was the question laughingly asked, "without the slightest intention of publishing them, Carl?"

"Without the slightest," replied Carl Burton; "but they were well worth the money, for it gave me infinite happiness to receive them."

"But surely you could use them. The love scenes, I am sure, are good?"

"Well, we'll never be able to send your boys to college if 'The Dolphin' begins to publish this kind of stories," answered her husband, looking tenderly at his wife, "besides, Ella, they are too precious for me to share with the public."

"It was poor dear Fred's suggestion," she said, gently.



## A Terrible Exposure.

By GEORGE ARLISS.

I AM going to speak of a "dressing-room," I don't mean a room where the every-day person arranges his toilette, a mere place of scented soaps and wardrobes ; no, I allude to the Actor's dressing-room, with a capital A ; that magic sanctum which admits the beardless boy of thirty-five at 7 p.m., and sends forth the oldest inhabitant, aged ninety, at 7.30, without once having opened its doors during the interval ; that is the place I speak of. Of course, it is quite *unnecessary* to speak of it, for although actors' dressing-rooms may have many and varied approaches—sometimes upstairs, sometimes downstairs, in and out and round about, still we all know what they are like inside ; we've all read about them so often. The thick velvet pile carpet, the numberless mirrors, the clever and wonderful arrangement of lights to assist the artiste in getting those marvellous effects that are admired so from the front—these we are so familiar with ; then that seductive saddle-bag chair into which the actor flings himself to enjoy his cigar during his "waits," has so often been photographed that it needs not "the present scribe" to bring it vividly before you ; the warm papering of the walls ; those clever and interesting pictures, each with its special history ; the open volume of Shakespeare's plays——

Don't you believe it ! I'm sorry, really very sorry, to have to say it, and half wish I could go back now ; it seems like telling tales out of school—but there, I've said it. Don't you believe it ! It isn't true ; it's a wicked fabrication from beginning to end. Lots of the rooms haven't any carpet on at all, the lights are always in the wrong place ; nine actors out of ten are so highly strung, that at the sight of an arm-chair in their dressing-room, they would swoon and be unfitted for work.

Ah ! I knew you would be shocked. I was. I was like you but a short while ago. I thought it was all true. But I know someone who knows two London actors (Mr. T. and Mr. L.) and I get him to take me through to their room. We arrive ; we knock at the door, and are told to "come right in." I have the pictures of the

illustrated interviews well in my mind, and am therefore lost in astonishment when I look around me. The actors are actually sitting on cane-bottomed chairs! And what's more, there isn't a spare one for me, so Mr. T. gives me his, and says he will sit on the bench. Bench! I'd never read anything about a bench in the interviews. Well, what do you think? The bench was what they used for a dressing table, and it was covered with a newspaper—they hadn't even a toilet-cover. I look round for the oil-paintings—the walls are adorned with nothing but theatrical posters and a few presentation plates from the comic papers—pinned up! If it were not for the cane-bottomed chairs, I feel I should reel at this discovery; I feel I must have something to support me; I pray (mentally, of course) that they will produce a bottle or so of that champagne that I know all actors have in their dressing-rooms. But when it comes to a question of refreshment, I can hardly believe my ears when I hear Mr. L. say to the dresser, "Sparks, run across to the 'Pump House,' and get four Scotches and two large sodas." Oh, how unromantic—how unspeakably common-place! However, I swallow my share of this restorative and partly regain my composure. Again I look round, and gain I'm shocked. Why does Mr. T. sit smoking a common pipe? Why doesn't he smoke a cigar? He can't be a proper actor. They commence chatting, and try to set me at my ease; but it's all wrong somehow; they talk on current topics—Dr. Jameson—the new photography—not a word about Macready, or Beaumont and Fletcher, or Colly Cibber. And when I venture to observe that I suppose they are studying for the new production, they both laugh and say, "not much; one at a time, gentlemen, if you please." And when I start talking about Hamlet, Mr. T. starts sparring with Mr. L., and trying to pull off his whiskers, and evinces not the slightest interest in the difference of the readings of Kean and Kemble. I can't make it out; I always thought they kept on discussing these things in dressing-rooms. I ask Mr. L. his opinion of the future of the drama, in respect to music-halls, and he says, "Gracious heavens! don't ask me. What I want to know is, who's going to win the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race." And this is an actor's dressing-room!

But the extraordinary part of the whole thing is, that this sanc-tum, concerning which British subjects have been hitherto misled, is so much jollier, so much more friendly than it would be if it re-

sembled the places we read about in the interviews. That's the reason I've yielded to the temptation to write this terrible exposure. I have a great respect for actors, and I wouldn't have said a word had it been to their discredit. When you come to think it over, no true artist could sit down and study Hamlet, whilst in the theatre playing, say, Captain Absolute. And a pipe is so much more sensible than a cigar for a man who can only spare five minutes at a time. And apropos of pipes, I will confess my very pleasant evening with Mr. T. and Mr. L. did not terminate without one theatrical anecdote. In response to some remark I made about smoking in the dressing-room, just as I was going, Mr. T. said, "That reminds me,"—(actors have a way, I find, of firing a last anecdote at you, just as you are going—it makes a sort of good exit). "That reminds me of a story of old Tom Mead, when he was playing Ghost to Irving's Hamlet, at the Lyceum. He always smoked a 'long' pipe in the dressing-room—in fact, he was seen smoking it on more than one occasion at the corner of Wellington Street and the Strand, and when asked 'Why do you smoke a long pipe in the street, Tom?' he replied, 'Because I prefer it to a short one, my boy,'—but that isn't what I was going to tell you. He was sucking away at his pipe in the dressing-room one night, and laying down the law on some theological subject, as was his wont, when the call boy rushed up and shouted, 'Mr. Mead, Mr. Mead, stage waits—Mr. Irving's given your cue.' 'Has he, by G—d,' growled Tom, and flinging down his pipe, he made all haste to the stage, and went on by the first entrance he could find, which happened to be the wrong side, and consequently the opposite side to which Hamlet had intimated his coming. Just as Irving was filling out the wait by gazing horror-stricken off R. at the imaginary ghost, what was his amazement and rage to hear a hollow cough behind him, and find old Tom coming on L. When the curtain fell, before Irving had time to remonstrate, Mead hurried up to him, and said, in that deep, sonorous voice of his, 'Notice that, guv'nor?—lovely idea—supernatural—ghost of your father—you look off R., see him coming, and he comes on L.—grand idea, guv'nor—supernatural.' Irving, who was always a good friend to Tom Mead, merely replied, 'Yes, very good, Mead, but we'll do it in the old-fashioned way, if you please.'

## Damocles, or the Gates of Janus.

By THEODORA CORRIE.

Author of "IN SCORN OF CONSEQUENCE," "PETRONELLA DARCY,"  
"ONLY THE AYAH," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XXI.—*continued.*

"I SUPPOSE you know," Paul began, presently, "that I went over to La Navette to attend my grandfather's funeral, as Dad was unable to leave home. Perhaps I had better tell you to begin with, that my grandfather, as a young man, took an oath never to marry, when his only brother committed suicide under exceptionally painful circumstances. The De Follet family, being under the curse of heredity insanity, he thought it best for the race to die out. My grandfather, a wonderfully clever man, had already written a play, which had a *succès fou* in Paris (and which, oddly enough, has been revived this year). At that time he was about thirty years of age, and the moving spirit of the most intellectual circle in Paris—a friend of Aunt Catherine's and of M. de Brie."

"A friend of Cousin Armand's?" asked Henrietta, in some surprise.

Paul nodded. "They were at school together in Paris, and afterwards, at the time when De Brie was private secretary to my uncle, they saw a great deal of each other, and of Aunt Catherine. At her house my grandfather first met my grandmother, then Mademoiselle du Tertre. She was an orphan, half French, half English by birth, and very lovely; talented and fascinating, too, I have been told, beyond measure. My grandfather fell in love at first sight. Circumstances threw them together a great deal, and after a time his resolution began to falter. He went to her to say good-bye: then seeing that he had betrayed himself, finding not only that she had guessed his secret, but that their love for each other was a mutual one, he broke down altogether. Forgetting his oath, everything but the thought of her grief, of his own misery, he told her the whole truth. He could not make up his mind to go away. He left the decision with her. It was too cruel: it seems to me that he might have spared her that.

"And she?" said Henrietta, below her breath.

"She was so young, so utterly unable to realise the curse in the family; she could not let him go. They were married after a very short engagement. She might easily have forgotten his past, but he could not. They had one only child, my mother, and when she was five years old it became necessary to send her away. My grandfather could not bear the sight of her. Wrapped up, as any

mother would be in an only child, my grandmother was nearly broken-hearted at the separation. My mother grew up away from her, an Italian at heart, being educated in Rome by a distant relation. Thoughtful, melancholy, and always very religious, she devoted herself heart and soul to nursing the sick and wounded when the war broke out; and she was scarcely nineteen when she married my father. Her letters were my grandmother's chief solace; for, all this time the state of my grandfather's spirits was becoming worse and worse. Society grew hateful to him. He shut himself up at La Navette, and would see no one. That was the beginning of the end; the very name of the White House has always carried a shadow with it in our family. Even now I cannot bear to picture what such a life must have been to my grandmother. She devoted herself entirely to my grandfather, studied with him, wrote all his letters and copied the articles which he composed for various scientific papers. Fortunately she was very clever and could follow him intelligently. But I suppose, in some form or other, hereditary disease is bound to show itself. There came a time when he overworked his brain, and was seized with a strange delusion: dictating in French, a series of abstruse metaphysical articles, which he imagined to be compositions of his own, but which in reality were very faithful translations, or rather adaptations from a couple of learned German works, read some years before, at the time of his brother's death. He had always possessed a wonderfully retentive memory, and now, to my grandmother's horror it played him false. She dared not enlighten him, being warned that by so doing, his one chance of recovery would probably be destroyed. 'Keep him in ignorance,' the doctor said; 'persuade him to take as much rest as possible. It is a mere freak of brain and memory; one not likely to recur if he is spared all worry about it.' The manuscript when finished was therefore entrusted to M. de Brie, and brought out as an adaptation from the German, but a few copies were sent to La Navette, with a different title page for my grandfather's benefit, his own name alone being on the back. Every precaution had been taken, but by a strange fatality a copy of the original German work was sent to my grandfather, by a friend living in Berlin. He read the book through quietly enough, without making a single remark, but that same evening he made a bonfire of all his papers, and could never be induced to touch a pen again, even to sign his own name. The shock of the discovery came as a fatal blow to a man of his temperament, and completely unhinged his mind. Realising that his memory had played him such a trick, that his own ideas could no longer be depended upon, he sank into a state of hopeless melancholy. When only a year later my mother came back to La Navette, and died insane, his own derangement took the form of religious mania. He believed himself to be hopelessly lost, a wandering soul condemned to remain upon earth on account of the oath he had broken."

Slow, painful tears filled Henrietta's eyes. "Your grandmother, Paul. How could she bear it?"

Paul flung out one hand, with an expressive gesture.

"I don't know, Hetty; I knew nothing of my grandfather's existence in those days. She, or Antoine, or Louise seldom left him. His rooms were quite away from ours, separated by double doors, generally kept locked. But just before I left La Navette, he made his escape one night, and came unseen to my room."

A faint shiver ran over Henrietta; involuntarily she clasped her hands tightly together.

"I was very frightened," Paul went on, "when I first waked and saw him standing by my bed. He told me that he was an evil spirit, sold, body and soul, to the powers of darkness. He threatened me with death, bidding me swear to be the last of my line; to keep the oath which he had broken. He assured me that in my faithfulness lay the sole hope of his own redemption, that he came himself as a spirit from the dead, permitted to bring me a warning. I was very young; I had never realised the meaning of the word, insanity. I honestly believed my grandfather to be dead and buried. I had a head stuffed full of the weird folk-lore of the fishermen, and of Andersen's tales, and above all, I had lately been reading Sintram. Pale, wasted and worn to a shadow, my grandfather looked like a ghost, and he spoke with a desperate earnestness that carried conviction with it. A child, suddenly waked from my first deep sleep, I remember the whole scene coming to me like some terrible vision. I did not realise the risk I ran, when he told me to take the oath or die. I remember repeating certain words as he bade me, and after that I have but a blurred recollection of the rest. The horror of it all must have been growing upon me. I must have begun to see that all was not as it should be; and at last, at the sound of my grandmother's voice in the hall, I remember rising from my knees, and flying to her for safety, as from a vision of death itself."

"I wonder that you did not die outright," said Henrietta, shuddering.

"You forget that I had my grandmother. I believe my father hoped all through my illness that I might forget the past; but I did not forget, or rather gradually I remembered everything. It became necessary to tell me the whole truth. An imperfect unexplained recollection of such an encounter would have been much worse than the simple facts. They called my illness low fever, but it was not that. I can dimly remember those weeks even now, as one long spell of horror. I believe that I had inflammation of the brain."

He was silent for a moment, and she did not interrupt him by a word, realising the relief of free speech to be exquisite after ten years of self-repression.

Yet even to her he did not reveal the whole truth. He would not trouble her with the knowledge of the dread which had hung over him during his school days, when John little guessed the repeated cautions against over-work, the giving way to any over-eagerly expressed wish, to have had the same effect upon Paul as a course of moral torture. No sharper curb could have been applied to a naturally impulsive nature. He never said that the mere thought of returning to La Navette, though eagerly looked forward to, had, at the same time, filled him with secret horror—horror of the White House, or that he clung to the home life at Godwin's Rest, knowing a time

to be fast coming when he must abandon it, and that the haunting prospect lay before him of being divided between two affections.

His first determination to settle for a time at La Navette he had only just abandoned, on Madame de Follet's declaration that she would go into a sisterhood if he attempted to live at the White House. Foiled in this endeavour to cheer her loneliness, he had made up his mind to accept M. Réport's offer, and to settle in Paris. From there he could, at any rate, get to La Navette from Saturday to Monday. To such a nature as Paul's, the mere idea of settling in London, of leaving Madame de Follet to a desolate old age, was an impossible one. Besides, there were other reasons which would probably have induced him to go to Paris.

He always signed his articles by the French half of his name, and more than once, lately, he had been spoken of favourably, as the younger De Follet. For the late Count had left a meteor-like reputation behind him; and this year, the revival of his play could hardly have occurred at a more opportune moment, where Paul was concerned. But apart from his literary prospects, he had begun, like his grandfather before him, to mistrust his own powers of self-control. He might wish Ted every happiness, but he could not stay at Henrietta's side to look into heaven through another man's eyes.

"I wish my grandmother could have sent for me sooner," he went on, presently. "Her life is a terribly lonely one. She is very frail and delicate, and has lived so long in the same way, that any change now would only distress her, but she is not fit to be left alone. I should like to spend the next six months at La Navette, myself, I could easily write my next play there."

The effect of this speech upon Henrietta was electrical. As in a vision there rushed over her the thought of generations of dead and gone De Follets; of the books handled year after year by the afflicted Count. It seemed to her as if so terrible a life must have left the impress of its own personality on things inanimate, which, in their turn, would influence and infect the new comer. And the rooms themselves! What echoes of vanished lives; of unspeakable pain and horror still lingered there!

"Paul," she said, "Paul, promise me that you will never go there to live. You are not surely thinking of it?"

The fear in her eyes seemed to shake him. He turned his head away, saying in a dull, repressed voice: "Henrietta, are you afraid for me too?"

The unconscious pathos of the gesture moved Henrietta almost to tears. There swept over her a pity that had in it something angelic. Spread before her in that one moment stretched Paul's generally veiled inner life. She read the loneliness, the unspoken dread; and holding the clue at last to his long endurance dimly fathomed its cost. Forgetful of self altogether, carried beyond into a region her footsteps had never before touched, she laid her hand on his arm.

"Paul," she said, and it might have been almost his own mother's voice; "look at me." Slowly, wistfully he scanned her face. "Paul," she said again, with almost a sob, "what is it? What are you afraid of?"

He tried to smile. "It's nothing, Princess; only, I had a foolish dislike to your knowing too much. You were the only one innocent at home. And there is sometimes a dread in my aunt's eyes, and in my father's; and I feared what I might see in yours. I was wrong, you have not grown afraid of me; I don't believe you ever would."

It seemed to Henrietta as if her heart would break. "Oh," she said, "don't, Paul, don't."

"Never mind me, Princess. I am selfish."

Henrietta shook her head. "It is not that. You must not think such a thing, even to yourself; and, besides, I did not mean what you seem to think. Promise me," she went on, supplicatingly, "promise me that you will never think that."

"What am I not to think?" said Paul, gently.

"That I could be afraid," said Henrietta, in a stifled voice, "nothing that could happen would make me. Don't you know that?"

Yes, he knew it now. Her voice moved him visibly, striking a very different note of sympathy to any that he had yet heard. The anxiety that touched his father's deep affection, hid itself by avoidance of the whole matter, and Mrs. Godwin never attempted a more than partial concealment of her fear. Henrietta's love was more perfect. For her own piece of mind she sympathised too well when others brought their troubles to her. The shadow resting upon Paul had become a part of her own life.

When the two came back to the drawing-room, half-an-hour later, they surprised Mrs. Godwin not a little. She raised herself, slightly, as the door opened, and suppressing a start, greeted Paul lightly, then said: "Well, darling, have you told your news?"

Henrietta paled suddenly, but truth was in her answer: "I meant to have told Paul, mamma, but when we began to talk, I forgot all about it."

"I should have thought that what concerned one's self could never be forgotten," said Mrs. Godwin, in some astonishment.

Here Paul spoke. "I have been very remiss, Aunt Laura, but I must plead to a selfish absorption in my own affairs. I think Henrietta is very much to be congratulated."

"I suppose you mean Ted is," said Mrs. Godwin, sharply. "How did you know about it?"

"I suppose they both are," said Paul, simply; "I met Ted when I arrived at the station, this evening. He was seeing a friend off to Paris."

This matter-of-fact announcement did not suit Mrs. Godwin at all. Most cat-like women in this world enjoy hunting possible mice, till they find themselves unsuccessful.

"To hear you speak, you might have known it all along," she said, pettishly. "Ted might have had better taste than to blurt it out before the porters."

"Ted told me on the way back. He drove me home: he is dining at the Chase this evening."

"Yes, I know where he is dining," said Mrs. Godwin. "Did he tell you that he wants a six-weeks' engagement?"

"Does he?" said Paul, imperceptibly. "I suppose he thinks

that Henrietta cannot do better than follow May's good example."

"I tell him that the idea is a ridiculous one," said Mrs. Godwin.

"Perhaps Ted does not approve of long engagements, Aunt Laura."

"Henrietta will probably wait till she is twenty-one," said Mrs. Godwin, who felt in a sufficiently contradictory mood to prove black white.

Paul smiled. "Considering the length of time Ted has waited, that would be rather hard on him, wouldn't it?"

"Waited!" said his aunt. "You speak as if you had known it all along."

"You see," said Paul, apologetically, "Ted told me three years ago, that he should never care for anyone else."

So far as Mrs. Godwin was concerned, this speech finished the discussion. She felt unreasonably vexed with Paul, partly because he made no reference to his stay at La Navette. His reserve affronted her, though she did not like to question him about the funeral, or his grandfather's will, with Henrietta in the room. His silence seemed to say she had no right to ask questions; that the De Follet affairs lay for ever in the gulf of oblivion to which the Godwin family had long ago consigned them.

John coming in later on, father and son went off together to the library; but even there, had Mrs. Godwin been listening, she would have heard little to satisfy her curiosity. The conversation that ensued was a short one; Paul's first enquiry being for his Aunt Catherine.

"She is up and about," said Godwin; "but in a very nervous state, unlike her usual self. I had to give up all idea of going to La Navette as you know. She seems to dread my being at any distance from the Grange. I suppose you and the doctor were the only people at the funeral."

"M. de Brie was there," said Paul. "I had no idea till the other day that he was such a friend of my grandparents."

"Nor I," said Godwin, briefly.

Both men, from long habit, displayed a curious reticence, being unwilling to say anything more to each other about the journey to La Navette than was absolutely necessary. Beyond a kindly enquiry as to the state of Madame de Follet's health, a genuine expression of regret that Paul had found her so aged and broken, and one or two necessary questions with reference to the funeral and to the will made years ago by the late Count on his marriage, Godwin's discussion of the whole affair only occupied a few minutes. Neither did he combat Paul's openly expressed wish to settle in Paris. He knew Madame de Follet to be in sadly failing health. Paul's projected visits from Saturday till Monday would be a solace to her, and if anything happened to snap this last tie, he had promised to travel for a year before settling down finally in Paris. His income would then be materially increased, and he would have no need to work so hard for his own maintenance. In the meantime, Godwin had already realised his own inability to alter his son's nature, or the resolution

formed years ago, which had grown with Paul's growth and developed into a man's purpose. M. Réport's offer was an exceptionally good one, and the present opening promised a brilliant career in the future, if Paul justified the little Frenchman's expectations.

And yet in his secret heart, far from being pleased at his son's prospects, Godwin felt only a strong sense of dissatisfaction with them, an inward foreboding as to the future which might almost have been termed morbid. He would far rather have turned Paul into a hunting squire, or sent him out to the colonies, than have seen him embark under the most brilliant auspices on a literary career, or indeed on any profession likely to tax the brain more than the body. The very depth of Godwin's affection had always made him reticent about the family skeleton.

A man is sometimes far less reserved with strangers for whom he cares little, than with the most dearly loved members of his own family. Affection draws its own map of hidden places, and the existence of some tender spot known only to one's self, the very fear of pressing too heavily upon it, often makes one sadly clumsy.

Paul, all the time this evening, was just as well aware of his father's hidden anxiety and unspoken wishes as if they had been proclaimed on the housetop. To go against them hurt him horribly, all the more that he hardly looked upon himself as a free agent.

When Godwin, after some desultory talk over a pipe, got up, preparing to be off to bed, he felt a detaining hand laid upon his empty coat sleeve, while Paul's voice said, stumblingly: "Dad, if it depended upon myself—I wish I could help you with your farming."

"God bless you, boy," said Godwin, conscious of a sudden lump in his own throat, "I know you would. I don't blame you. Confound it all, if I were in your place, I should go to Paris myself."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

EARLY on the following morning Godwin went to town and only returned home late in the evening looking unusually preoccupied. He met his sister-in-law's questions with vague answers about necessary business, that told her nothing, and effectually baffled further enquiry. His determined reticence had a visibly bad effect upon her temper. The journey to London constituted a complete departure from John's usual habits, a departure which should have been accompanied by some sufficient reason, but no explanation was offered, and like Jonah, Mrs. Godwin felt she did well to be angry. Added to this cause of offence, to her great indignation John next sold the horse he had so far provided for her brougham, made her give notice to several of the servants, and insisted that all the rooms in the house not in daily use, should be shut up. She might take refuge in her own boudoir, but the very air seemed full of the coming change. During the next few days she maintained the air of a person undergoing undeserved martyrdom.

The mere prospect of her brother-in-law's move to the farm in September jarred upon her pride terribly. The day that he left Godwin's Rest would see her own departure for Italy, but if Aunt Catherine lived on for a few months longer everyone in the neighbourhood would know that John's affairs were embarrassed, and that Little Abbey had become temporarily the only house which he could call his own. Such bad taste, to proclaim his poverty when in a short time he would be a rich man again. Judging by her manner one might easily have imagined John to be about to take up his abode in a hovel; she herself being one of those persons who might have indited a poem to a ruin, but who would never have attempted to make the ruin habitable. In her present frame of mind she would have levelled Little Abbey to the earth gladly.

Even a flight of cheery letters from May failed to dissipate her present sense of irritation. Her pent up feelings might have found an escape in words as well as looks had not a more absorbing subject demanded a large share of her interest and attention.

This year for the first time Henrietta had begun to play a part on the little stage where Mrs. Godwin's personal ambitions and desires strutted up and down. She believed that her own child would before long reign at the Grange and for ever oust Evelyn Thorne from the long held position of daughter of the house. For the health of the Duchess declined day by day : of this fact Mrs. Godwin felt convinced, knowing that no ordinary business would have kept John from attending his father-in-law's funeral, or have taken him to the Grange two nights in succession, nominally to dine there. She had a shrewd suspicion that he had not gone to town on his own account, but on urgent business for Aunt Catherine. If anything "happened" the move abroad would no longer be a matter of dire necessity but of free choice. If need be it would be very easy to hint to Evelyn that John was only letting his house out of a mistaken sense of courtesy : though she was not so keenly anxious to remain at Godwin's Rest for an indefinite period with the prospect before her of the Grange as a possible home.

In the meanwhile Henrietta's pursuits, her drives with Ted and Evelyn, her long afternoons spent at the Grange, her walks and expeditions: all these things suddenly became interesting to Mrs. Godwin on account of the goal to which they pointed. The girl often went to see Miss Lavender (now entirely in bed, and in such an alarmingly weak state that all thought of a sea voyage had been abandoned), and her frequent visits to the invalid were unhindered by maternal censure, nay even tolerated with a shrug of shoulders, and an indulgent smile, for the simple reason that Ted seldom let a day pass without calling at the Nutshell, and that whenever Henrietta expressed a wish to go there, he went too as a matter of course. He revered all women, because of their womanhood, in Charles Lamb's fashion ; and he never forgot that if Maurice had lived Miss Lavender might have become his sister-in-law. Stranger things have happened : the Miss Swanns were in poor circumstances now a days ; but seven generations of the family, former priests of the parish lay buried in Godwin's Rest churchyard, and a tiny headstone to an

infant son had marked the greatest grief of the late rector's life. The village people might be forgiven if they shook their heads mentally over Mr. Proser.

The Miss Swanns held a position of their own in the parish apart from their small income, besides, Miss Lavender had long ago found a sure passport to Ted's heart—for she always talked about Henrietta. The girl never discussed herself in the pretty happy fashion affected by most people when they are engaged. If she had any hopes or fears she seldom confided them to Ted. He watched her sometimes, half amused, more than half touched by her manner. "You never really show me yourself except when you are playing," he said to her one day. "I shan't be content Hetty till I have taught you to be more egotistical for my special benefit." And Henrietta could only laugh and blush, her very reticence untouched by a trace of self-consciousness was a fascinating thing to charm away. In no hurry to claim anything he took her time and his own too, and went to work as if he were taming some shy creature of the woods, never letting her be startled, but insensibly lessening the distance between them. The two spent delightful afternoons together at the Grange. Henrietta went there nominally to play to her Aunt Catherine, who always sat in a bow window looking down into a beautiful orangery at one end of the long music room, while Ted at the other had the piano and the performer all to himself. Till quite lately Henrietta had been utterly unconscious of the value of the great gift which had descended to her as a portion of her foreign inheritance, a gift that lay not in her throat but in her long slender fingers, that rare power given to the true improvisatrice, to move men and women alike to tears or laughter: to weave a spell and lure the world after it into an utter oblivion of the present, of the player, of the pretext, or of any immediate surroundings. Who remembers the magician or his wand when the face that we never hoped to see again on this side eternity rises before us once more in the magic mirror and what do we reck of old age, or loneliness or sorrow when on the wings of a perfect harmony, a spirit bears us away to the lost gardens of our youth. True this is not the music we hear every day, but when the gods fled from earth they left the echo of their voices behind them, and here and there are those among us who, walking up and down, "can still catch the melodies floating in the air."

At the Grange playing to her Aunt, Henrietta knew that she had found her true vocation, she would never need to say again that an angel had whispered a message, and she had failed to deliver it. What wonder if, save for the thought of Paul's troubles Henrietta, with Ted at her side, knew more perfect happiness than often falls to the lot of mortals. An intense love, a vast compassion formed the very keynote of her nature, and at last she had found a language and could make herself understood. Always lovely, she was lovelier than ever since her engagement. A magic lay in her music more moving to a listener, than any eloquent oratory or fiery exhortation. Genius, untouched by a spark of personal vanity, calling like love and joy, to a tired world bears ever the impress of something beyond us, something angelic. Ted watching her at the piano one afternoon caught

his breath, moved by a sudden sharp fear, " Hetty," he said, " Hetty where are you? come back!" Henrietta looked up absently and ceased playing. " What are you thinking of?" he went on, possessing himself of her hands which still rested on the keys. And at this question her eyes fell suddenly, their dreamy unconsciousness giving place to a swift joy which vainly tried to hide itself.

" I was thinking," she said, " how very wonderful it is that I should be sitting here with you. What is the matter Ted?"

And he conscious of sudden relief answered her smilingly: " There is nothing the matter, absolutely nothing, come away and talk to me, I believe I am jealous of your music."

But Henrietta only laughed at this suggestion, knowing that thanks solely to Ted's intervention, she had not only received permission to play at the Grange, but also would be allowed to sing a solo at the annual village concert, the date for this entertainment not being far off.

During the next fortnight the last practices were successfully accomplished, and early in August the performance would take place. Held in the reading-room the affair was always a great success, from the village point of view. Even the Duke offered himself up for martyrdom with a smiling face at the time, only an occasional twitching of the muscles betraying his inward anguish. But he always went home afterwards with the air of a man who has thrown off a nightmare. His own playing was regarded as a great condescension. Twenty years ago radical ideas had hardly filtered down through the more pronounced strata of towns, to the remoter country villages; and in Godwin's Worthy the ducal presence, when it could be procured, always set the seal to any local function. No more to be done without than the bit of real Latin begged for from the rector by one old woman, as a set off to her husband's funeral sermon. What matter if the parson declared that he seldom preached funeral sermons, and was not fond of Latin quotations. What matter if the dead man had been a notorious poacher, an evil liver, and that his wife could not understand a word of any foreign tongue? Ignorance did but enhance the value of the coveted oration, and she gladly would have offered several guineas for a " bit of learning" in order to have her good man " put away comfortable."

In like manner the village would have paid a subscription willingly to ensure the Duke's presence. He was known to care little for comic songs, and his music could not be followed or understood, but this very peculiarity mightily enhanced its value. Common tunes were not expected from his Grace. He came as the old clerk said, " to show the unedicated what could be done with a musical instrument." His " cat" never squeaked, it knew too well who had got hold of it, and he generally wound up with a weird march from Wagner which made the village flesh creep, and evoked a storm of applause. " Taint no use trying to describe such music," the clerk would say, " but it's most like a churchyard after dark. One can't think of much else till one's got fairly by it."

On this evening of the concert the first portion of the performance went off remarkably well, though, perhaps, in their secret hearts some

of the audience felt happier when they had passed from the classical music to the second and more amusing division of the programme. At this point Henrietta noted a certain comfortable relaxation in the backs of the listeners, a certain settling into easier attitudes, and a different expression on most of the faces: wonderment and strained attention giving place to a placid expectation, as if the company, having accomplished a tough run over unknown country, to their own extreme credit, could now venture to come back to the well trodden plains of everyday life. As Henrietta whispered to Ted, no one could doubt that "Meet me by moonlight" was provocative of relief; and by the time the station master reached the "Huddle Muddle Porter," everyone smiled unrestrainedly. Here the people were at home. Here, as one old farmer said, "one knew what was likely to come. Here the tune ran straight as an old furrow, and left off where a man might reasonably expect to pick it up again, any time." And it was easy to see that his Grace could condescend too, to an old tune as well as anybody, for he always clapped, and to judge by his face he felt the pathetic deeply.

Ted had been pressed into the service this evening and sang "Tom Bowling" with great effect: while the navvies admitted on the strength of their fossil collecting clapped deafeningly. Henrietta's song brought down the house and was encored: as the poor people said afterwards they could hear every word of it, and she looked like a picture in her white gown. But perhaps, of all the performers John was the most welcome. He had learned his music in no modern school. He cared little for Chopin or Wagner, when he could get Mozart or Handel, and he was very fond of simple ballads, like the Banks of Allan Water, and Old Robin Grey. Then too he could meet the village on the village ground, with a certain comic song well beloved from long repetition, and known to fame by the title of "The Cork Leg." No concert would have been considered complete without it, and it was always called for and encored every year, though John sometimes tried to cry off, or vainly offered to substitute something fresh. With the skeleton of the Dutchman the entertainment came to a close, and everyone stood up to sing "God save the Queen." The audience were about to leave the reading-room, when a mounted groom rode to the door, tossed his rein to the nearest man, and hurrying to the front benches, spoke a few words to the Duke in a low tone of voice.

In less than a minute a rumour began to circulate that the Duchess had been taken very ill. The people streamed out soberly, and Henrietta went home to break the tidings to her mother.

Mrs. Godwin asked many eager questions, but the girl having heard few details could only say that the Duchess had been found unconscious and the doctor sent for. The cause of the attack remained a matter of conjecture. No more news could reasonably be expected to-night, and Henrietta soon found herself ordered off to bed, with an injunction to refrain from over anxiety, and to hope for the best. Once left alone Mrs. Godwin abandoned her novel, and strangely enough indulged in no castle building, made no fresh plans. So long as the Duchess was merely ailing, and her death a bare possibility,

the imaginary spending of the Godwin money had seemed a very harmless pastime, but with the nearer approach of death Mrs. Godwin's conscience, usually in blinkers and easily managed, drew back alarmed. She said to herself that it would be heartless and unbecoming to make plans, and her Italian superstition asserted itself, refusing to be set aside. It was not wise to make too certain of anything, and this evening the Godwin money must not be thought of, for the same reason that May's bridal dress had been refused house-room till the morning of the wedding. Unable to give attention to the usual novel, and unwilling to think of future probabilities, she took a sleeping draught and knew nothing more till the next morning, when Henrietta appeared at the bedside with a relieved face. Ted had ridden over early, bringing, on the whole, less disquieting news. The Duchess after an unusually busy day had fainted from over-fatigue, but had soon recovered consciousness, and had passed a fairly good night subsequently; though the doctors this morning declared her illness to be influenza accompanied by rheumatism. Taking the attack in time Dr. Clifford hoped that it might not prove serious. The influenza was very much about, and there had been a great many cases in the village.

Mrs. Godwin shook her head, remarking that she had seen a great change in her aunt's looks this summer, but of course while there was life there was hope. Only Dr. Clifford was always such an optimist, one could hardly trust to his opinion. Her own head was aching very badly, and her nerves were quite shattered by all the anxiety which she had lately undergone, and any fresh trouble quite exhausted her. It was really a great nuisance that the influenza should be in the village. She desired Henrietta to pull down the blinds, and to leave her to rest, unless any further news came from the Grange.

The girl, very fond of her great aunt, went away more slowly than she had come in, her natural hopefulness damped by her mother's desponding manner.

Ted spent the morning at Godwin's Rest, and stayed to luncheon, but he took himself off afterwards. Paul would be leaving for Paris next week, having received a letter from M. Réport only this morning, fixing the date of his departure. He was looking tired and not at all well, so Ted thought; and not being an exacting or a jealous lover he fancied, with instinctive kind-heartedness, that the cousins might like to see as much of each other as possible during the next few days.

Ted once gone, Henrietta finding Mrs. Godwin still inclined to doze, took her way to the old oak tree in the garden, and sitting down with her back to its trunk, waited expectantly for Paul to make his appearance. For the play was finished, the first play which had taken him nearly a year to write, and this afternoon according to long standing promise he would read it aloud to her.

Knowing that Paul would answer M. Réport's letter before coming out, she had brought a book in her hand, to pass away the time: the old play book lent to her by Ted, in which Mrs. Godwin had found her buried on the evening of the first rehearsal, and which

had taken her fancy completely, as, unknown to her, it had taken Paul's years ago, when he was a mere child living at La Navette.

From Shakespeare downwards, plays of every kind had always attracted Henrietta, ever since the days when she and Paul had held their mimic stage in the boughs of the Dryad's oak : possibly because she had always believed in Paul's powers, and with youthful confidence looked forward to the time when he would undoubtedly become famous.

This afternoon with thoughtful fingers she turned the last leaves of the Count's book. The play was a tragedy, and the final scene in it appealed strangely to her. The poetical side of grief or suffering is a beautiful mystery, which the young and happy look at eagerly, studying grief on paper, as they would study the alphabet of some exquisite, unlearnt science, or as a thing apart, a thing more beautiful than terrible. But those who have once known sorrow find their attitude changed insensibly, and they draw a veil over what is henceforth hallowed ground. Between these two attitudes Henrietta stood midway. Young and happy she might be, but sorrow had not passed her by this summer, and to-day after finishing "Alcirat" she let the thin volume fall into her lap, and clasping both hands round her knees she looked wistfully across the sunny glade, with eyes that were full of tears. An acorn fell on her hair, and her favourite red squirrel peeped down unheeded from between the tree branches.

Her thoughts were far enough away. Paul was leaving for Paris next Wednesday, and to-day was Saturday. He had made all his plans and preparations calmly enough, and Henrietta tried to believe that by this time she too had made up her mind to the inevitable. Vainly this afternoon, however, she tried to picture him living in Paris, to plan his future visits to Godwin's Rest when the old times might come over again : her well meant castles failed to take satisfactory shape. Always in the background lay a shadow, the shadow of the White House. A strong presentiment of evil hung over her ; a dread refusing to be shaken off, that something terrible would happen to Paul if he spent any time at La Navette. After his first month in Paris, she knew he meant to go regularly to see his grandmother from Saturday till Monday, and that he planned to keep Christmas at the White House. She chid herself for her own low spirits, which had not been lightened this week by the depression in her uncle's manner : by the instinctive belief that he shared her own unspoken apprehensions.

Nearly half an hour went by and she had not moved, when Paul came to the old trysting place with the packet of manuscript in his hand, exactly as he would have come seven years ago, with some childish play or fairy tale. Only to-day the two settled themselves side by side at the foot of the oak tree, instead of climbing aloft. Their old fairy land still stretched itself above their heads, but they had come down to realities. Regretfully enough they halted for the last time at the entrance gate of their childhood, and looked through the bars : that gate which stands as a turnpike, across the road to life's battle ground. Henrietta leant her cheek

against the tree trunk and half shut her eyes, while all the world before her seemed full of dancing sunbeams. "Do you remember the day you first went to school?" she said presently. Paul nodded. "You are an author now, and I am grown up, but ever since that time when you first talked about it, Paul, I have known that you would return to France."

"Nothing else has ever seemed possible to me," he said, stifling a sigh. Over again he could hear Henrietta's own cry uttered long ago—"Don't go, don't go, or you will never come back. It will be like the swan fairy tale." A touch of fatalism possessed him today, giving to the simplest occurrences the stamp of inevitability. He knew that he would never have Henrietta all to himself any more. His love might never find utterance, and when he came home again she would be Ted's wife. To prevent dangerous thoughts he began talking about his play. It was divided into three parts, each of which complete in itself, could be performed separately. He told her this afternoon, that the whole plot had come to him bit by bit as if from far away.

"Yes I know," said Henrietta sympathetically, "I think it was Wagner who used to walk up and down to catch the melodies floating in the air, I feel just the same about music. But you won't work too hard, Paul. You have had so many headaches lately." Leaning forward she laid one hand on his with a tender gesture, peculiarly her own, and one of her greatest charms. A gesture completely free from self-consciousness. The light touch brought a sudden flush to his face. "Work never hurt anyone yet," he said, "but I feel as nervous to-day as a school-girl at her first recitation. Don't ask a question when I am once off, or I shall be done for."

"I won't speak till you have finished, I won't even sit where you can see me," she said half amused, wholly sympathetic, moving slightly, and leaning back so that one great root of the tree trunk came between her face and his. "Do you remember the poem I once composed, and how I boxed your ears in the middle of it, because you stared at me so hard while I tried to repeat it?"

Paul laughed, then he sighed, and without further delay, began reading.

The play written in French he had called *Le pont Macabre*. The scene was laid in Arabia, and in Venice, during the seventeenth century, and the plot, being of a weird description, he had introduced Satan; a personage likely to damn any piece, handled without exceptional cleverness. But from the very first lines of the opening scene Henrietta's attention never faltered, and her rapt almost spell-bound interest might have satisfied the most exacting author.

Full of power and originality the plot was a remarkable one, daringly conceived and still more daringly carried out. Yet before the end of the first act, a look of something more than interest grew upon Henrietta's face, a look of bewilderment, and of nervous dread. She sat listening with the air of a person who hears a note of alarm sounded, but cannot assign to it any particular cause.

By and by however, as Paul continued reading, she grew pale. Perplexity changed to unmistakable terror, terror giving place in its turn to an overpowering sensation of faintness. The grass, the trees, the very sunlight faded away into a black mist, and the ground seemed to give way beneath her feet. Fighting with this weakness as one fights with some terrible pain that can only be borne, second by second, Henrietta crushed her hands together, and rested her head against the tree trunk, till the view in front gradually steadied itself again, to the sound of Paul's voice.

He could not see her face: she must not faint, she must *not*. Over and over again this thought asserted itself mechanically, while Paul unconscious of her emotion read on forgetful of everything but the pages in his hand.

The sky had grown darker during the last hour: little gusts of wind blew up from the south west, where heavy clouds heralded the near approach of a rain storm.

The moisture stood thick on Henrietta's forehead as she sat listening, yet, despite the great heat, she shivered. Her glance sought the darkening sky mechanically. Would the storm break before Paul finished reading, before discussion of the play became unavoidably necessary?

Forcing herself to sit still she noted the little pile of manuscript now gradually growing upon the grass, as Paul dropped the loose sheets one by one from his hand. The sound of his voice hurt her head. Every word he uttered came to her ears with torturing distinctness, charged with a double meaning, unperceived by the reader. For one person may easily recognise a danger signal, where another notices nothing extraordinary. And to-day like the echo of a far-off voice beating an accompaniment to the play, and to the darkening sky, Paul's own words spoken on the evening of his return from La Navette rang on in Henrietta's ears:—"In some form or other hereditary disease is bound to show itself. A time came, when my grandfather was seized with a strange delusion. He had always possessed a singularly retentive memory, and now to my grandmother's horror it played him false."

Over and over again these sentences repeated themselves, refusing to be silenced. The afternoon wore on: the sky clouded more and more. Insensibly Paul's own voice dropped to a lower key. By and by the last type-written sheet fell from his hand, and he ceased reading. For him to-day the tragedy seemed to be at an end: the girl at his side knew that it was only just beginning.

"I hope you don't think it too sad," he said.

"It couldn't be too sad, Paul."

"Are you satisfied? Do you think it good," he asked with undisguised earnestness.

Henrietta's fingers closed convulsively across the small book lying in her lap. "I think," she said slowly, "I think it is a work of genius—a work to live—the greatest tragedy I have ever heard."

Paul couldn't see her face, but the low tones of her voice vibrating strangely, told him that she was moved almost beyond speech.

For once a wave of perfect and triumphant happiness passed

over him : the first consciousness of power, power to move others. He jumped up stretching both arms above his head, and drew a long breath as if to throw off some strong feeling. His eyes shone : anyone looking at him then would have seen a strange beauty in the usually sombre face.

"I wish you were my public, Princess. You are," he added, under his breath, "I mean you are a delightful listener."

Henrietta stood up too, taking hold of one of the boughs of the oak tree, while her fingers played mechanically with the leaves. "Where shall you send your play first, Paul ? "

"To La Navette," said Paul : "my grandmother is so anxious to read it. Besides, a very old friend of hers, the lessee of the theatre in Paris, goes to Les Graces for sea bathing every August. He is there now, and he always makes a point of visiting my grandmother. He has revived my grandfather's play this year very successfully, the one I told you about. And he takes a kind interest in me just because I am half a De Follet. He has promised to go to La Navette next Sunday, and my grandmother wishes to read my play to him, so I must trust it to the post. If only he thinks well of it ! This chance of getting a hearing is a better one than I could have hoped for."

"When must you send the play off, Paul ? "

"To-morrow, without fail. I see that one or two passages need a little tinkering first of all. If it is approved of ! I can't tell you what it will mean to me Henrietta."

The girl put up one hand to her throat : "I would give, ah, I cannot tell what I would give to see you successful," she said in a low voice.

"And in the meantime," he said remorsefully, looking up at the darkening sky, and suddenly conscious of some heavy drops which were falling on his hand, "in the meantime I have let you in for a wetting." Taking her hand he set off at a run, but they had barely reached the hall door when the rain came down in torrents.

Pale and breathless Henrietta mounted the stairs to her own room, shaking the water drops from her dress as she ran. Yet all the while scarcely conscious of them or of anything, save that in the folds of her gown her hand still held safely hidden, as if it were some guilty thing, the tiny leather covered volume lent to her by the Count. Locking the door of her room, and throwing herself down on the bed, she lay there trembling, gazing before her with anguished eyes. For she knew the truth now, knew it beyond a doubt. The play Paul had just finished, and the old world English tragedy in her lap were almost identical.

A work of genius and of pathos, Paul's French play : a work to live truly, but the one might almost have passed for a modernised and singularly poetical adaptation, say rather translation, from the other. And of this inherited freak of brain and memory Paul was as happily ignorant as Henrietta herself might have been had she never borrowed a book from Ted. For a long time she lay motionless, shedding no tears. This unlooked for calamity, so overpowering in its suddenness, so far reaching in its evil possibilities, stunned her.

Le Pont Macabre—Alcirat—the two titles, alike yet unlike, repeated themselves with dull insistence: linked to Paul's own words, "In some form or other hereditary disease is bound to show itself." Possibly during his sojourn at Oxford he had come across this rare book, and the strain of over work temporarily suspending his judgment might have injured his powers in this one direction and fatally affected his memory. It never occurred to her that he could have read the book as a child at La Navette. One train of ideas after another wandered through her mind. Paul's moods of intense depression, better known to her than to anyone else, had never been a source of alarm so far. For she knew quite well that he had outgrown his strength as a schoolboy, and that the doctor always coupled his great height and his neuralgia together: moreover being of a reticent disposition he never willingly owned to a headache.

Quiet, reserved, and a born student, his absent-minded gravity and his absorption in his work, had always seemed to be a part of his very nature. But Henrietta said to herself now that he had not looked well all the summer: that at the end of this second chapter in his life he might easily have passed for a man of thirty. And before him, like a silver streak, a rainbow in a dark sky, lay his literary career. He was so full of hopeful ambition about his play, And she had not betrayed herself out there under the oak tree, of this fact she felt assured. But what would happen next? What would happen if Paul or the frail grandmother ever found out? The thought was a horrible one: it drove her like some hunted creature to the one refuge common to human desperation. Getting off the bed she knelt down, and folding her hands, bowed her head. Outside the storm wore itself out unheeded, and a long hour passed before she once more looked up. Then her lips moved and the beautiful innocent face wore a strangely unchildlike look: "Paul, Paul," she whispered, "*forgive me, but you shall never know it, never.*"

The mere utterance of these words seemed to give her courage. Rising from her knees and picking up a pencil she hurriedly wrote a note, and directed it to M. de Brie: next with mechanical care arranged her dress, slipped on a thicker pair of shoes, hid a cloth cap in her pocket, and went downstairs.

The events of the afternoon were not yet over. In the hall Paul met her. He had evidently been out again, for he was in the act of removing a wet cricketing cap, and remarked in a contented voice that the storm seemed to be blowing itself out, with a south country mist as an accompaniment.

"You have been out in all this wet," she said, laying her hand on his coat sleeve.

"Only as far as the post office. There was so little left to do, I found after all I could finish the play before post time: that's a good job done."

Fortunately for Henrietta the hall was very dark. She made answer quietly; advising him to change his coat. But when obediently enough he had vanished up the stairs, she swayed suddenly and caught hold of the banisters for support. For the second time to-day this new sensation of giddiness had to be fought, with a

desperate courage which refused to be beaten. In another minute she had crossed the hall; taken down her little waterproof cloak, and fastened it on. Then with one stealthy look round to make certain that no other eyes could see her, she slipped through the side door which opened on to the terrace, and setting off at a run, disappeared into the mist.

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### CHAPTER XXIII.

THE road from Godwin's Worthy to the Grange was a lonely one, bordered by high holly hedges and thickets of yew, broken here and there by a gate, and a grassy track leading down to some foot-bridge across the water. Not a pleasant neighbourhood for any pedestrian after dark, and one much favoured by footpads, where no friendly farm-house or cottage could be found, and where the solitary policeman was generally at one end of his beat when most wanted at the other. So thought the Comte de Brie, on this particular Saturday evening, as he came riding along the muddy highway, at a pace which covered the ground very quickly.

After a prolonged call at Godwin's Worthy, behold him now on his way back to the Grange. He knew the road well enough by this time, but a couple of rough-looking tramps passed him in the dusk, and he was not sorry to enter the tiny village of Godwin's Rest, and to come within sight of its first house, the post office. Farther down the street stood the village inn, the Godwin Arms. Beyond, again, the road turned sharply by the river, and divided, branching in two directions. Here the ground fell away to a long stretch of water meadow, and at the junction of the two roads a fine clump of beeches stood up in an oasis of green grass; the trees forming a natural screen on the farther side of the inn.

Here, the Count came upon a horse and cart. The former hitched up to a conveniently low tree branch, had moved to the full length of the rein by which it was tethered, and now stood across the road effectually blocking the way, and affording a very good pitfall for any unwary driver. At this time of the evening the road should have been light enough, but the rain still fell in a steady drizzle, accompanied by a heavy wind. A mist from the river, rising fast, in the rapid fashion common to south country fog, mingled with the rain, and covered the meadows. A mist, hanging like a cloud of rolling smoke over the roadway, rendering even the thick hedges dim and indistinct.

Finding that the owner of the cart was nowhere to be seen, the Count dismounted. He guessed that the fascinations of the Godwin Arms might be responsible for the unguarded vehicle. He had almost taken the horse by the head, when his quick eye caught sight of a figure at the back of the cart, apparently occupied in tying up a large sack; a figure tall and slender, and strangely familiar, though

closely wrapped in a long cloak. As he stood looking through the front of the cart, which had a covered top, left open behind, the figure raised its head. If ever the Count saw despair in a human face, he saw it then. Yet the eyes looking straight into his own seemed scarcely conscious of his presence, as if whatever the cause of their suffering, they could see nothing else.

Like a man shot he stopped short; then with a muttered exclamation, turned round facing the door of the inn, turned too sharply it seemed, for he nearly upset someone else—a man, who at this moment came out of the Godwin Arms, and walking none too steadily, made straight for the cart.

Giving a violent lurch, this last comer recovered himself, with a muttered apology. "Beg pardon, sir, the mist is so thick, I hardly saw you coming."

Looking through the fog, the Count recognised the postman. "Why, Wallis," he said, making, the while, an effectual barrier of his own body, so that no one else could pass him by, "you're late this evening. Been keeping the cold out, eh?"

Wallis was scarcely in a condition to frame a sensible answer, but apparently his interlocutor failed to find anything amiss. Pulling some loose silver from his pocket, he entered upon a desultory conversation about the more punctual delivery of the letters at the Grange, a conversation which seemed to end amicably enough; then he turned his head, glancing carelessly over his shoulder. The dark figure no longer stood at the back of the cart, and the road behind seemed deserted.

"Well, good night," he said, "drive steadily, my man."

The caution was a salutary one. After making various vain attempts to get up, Wallis climbed into the cart, fumbling with the reins, while Polly started off at a sober pace, sure-footed and steady. She knew the road blindfold, and fortunately for her own safety, needed little guidance from her master this evening.

But long before the postman could gather up the reins, the Count remounted and rode off in the direction of the house which he had left only a short time ago. To the very gates of Godwin's Rest he went, meeting no one on the way, then more slowly rode back, again, scanning the hedges from side to side, and looking over gates, all to no purpose.

The rain still fell, and the white mist covered everything; it had taken possession of the road by this time.

The Count consulted his watch, the minute hand pointed to half past six. Then he turned round once more, and riding slowly, reached the Lodge, dismounted, led his horse inside the gates, and then stood waiting. Some ten minutes more dragged by, while the rain ran off his hat unheeded, and then though the mist still hid all distant objects, he heard the sound of a flying footstep. Nearer and nearer it came, till out of the twilight appeared a slender, girlish figure, cloaked and hooded. No need to open the gate; it was swung wide for her, while like an arrow, Henrietta sped past the Lodge.

Catching at the Count's hand as she passed, with a faint exclama-

tion of relief, she struck obliquely across the grass, skirted a clump of sheltering trees, turned down a narrow pathway, and came at last to the front of a rustic boat-house abutting on the river. The door was locked, but a deep wooden benched porch afforded some protection from the weather.

Here she halted, spent and exhausted, past speech, and leaned against the doorway, while the water ran off her cloak, and her damp hair curled round the edges of her hood. Save for the unnatural brightness of the eyes, her face resembled that of a fainting person. The white mist seemed to be dancing round her giddily, till a hand came on her shoulder, and she saw the Count looking down at her, with intense concern upon his face. Twice she tried to speak, then drew from her pocket the letter written only that afternoon, saying, faintly : "Read that, Cousin Armand."

He took it in silence, and read it through, without making a single remark, but when he had folded up the paper and carefully placed it in the inner pocket of his coat, he stood looking in front of him with an expression, which Henrietta understood well enough.

"And he suspects nothing?" he said at last.

"No, nothing." She had recovered her breath by this time, and could speak connectedly. "He must never find out, Cousin Armand, never."

"Yes, you are right, he must never find out," he repeated. Then with a swift movement, putting out his hand, he drew the slight figure down to the bench under the porch. "My child, what brings you out here to night? Why didn't you post your letter to me?"

Henrietta passed one hand across her forehead. "This afternoon—as I went downstairs, Paul came in. He had taken his play to the post, to-day instead of to-morrow. He had been able to get it finished."

"Ah, I see," he said, under his breath, with a light of sudden intelligence in his eyes.

"I slipped out," she went on, quietly enough now—too quietly; her whole manner troubled her listener more and more. "I knew that packet must never reach La Navette. Madame de Follet is so proud of him. If she knew! Oh, Cousin Armand, all these years she has borne such a heavy burden, and she is so frail. It seemed to me that I must get that packet. I had meant to catch Wallis at the corner, to give him your letter; I was too late for the country post, I knew, and I could not have asked for the parcel, I could have given no reason, but Wallis always stops for a glass of whiskey at the inn, after getting the letters, and ties his horse up. This last fortnight, I know he has not been steady again, and I thought he might be in there for a minute or two longer than usual, drinking, and he was——"

Instinctively the Count cast a glance at the slight hands, nearly hidden, holding something under the folds of the long waterproof cloak. The girl did not look at him; having once begun her story, she went on with it, mechanically.

"He was in there for nearly ten minutes, and no one else was about. And I untied the letter bag, and Paul's was not the only parcel——" Here she paused.

"You took it," he said, very quietly, more with the air of a man making an assertion, than of one asking a question.

For the first time this evening, Henrietta turned her glance full upon him. A tide of burning colour dyed her face. "Yes, I took it, you guessed that."

"*Mon enfant*, if I had found an angel in a strange place, I should know that only an errand of mercy could have taken it there."

Her eyes dilated strangely, the shamed colour faded, her head went up with a fearless gesture. "Yes, I took it," she repeated; "but when I started, I only thought of Paul, I had forgotten the postman would be responsible. I had forgotten that nothing can make wrong right. And so—I put it back again."

Once again she seemed to have lost all consciousness of his presence. Her eyes, with a touch of appeal in them, looked far beyond him. Her voice had no doubt or rebellion in it, but a note calling through despair to that universal law of righteousness, which embraces all life; and as she ceased speaking, the Count realised that were he to live the lifetime of his present years over again, time could show him nothing more beautiful than her face at this moment.

Involuntarily he lifted his hand, and stood for a moment bare-headed in the rain, as he would have stood before the shrine of the Madonna.

The gesture brought back the consciousness of his presence to Henrietta, and she went on speaking.

"I saw then," she said, simply, "that if such a parcel disappeared unaccountably, if Wallis could be taxed with outstaying his time at the Godwin Arms, drinking, he would be held responsible for leaving the cart, or suspected of the theft himself. It seemed to me, if I could have borne the blame myself, it would not have mattered. And then I think God put a plan into my head. I saw that Wallis had laid a sack over Polly's back to keep the rain off, and the sight of it decided me. You know the cart is a covered one, with plenty of room behind the driving seat. While you were talking to Wallis, I climbed in from the back. I crouched down on the floor, and he threw the sack in on top of me, almost. I could tell by the way he drove he was not himself, and then I knew a child could be a match for him. He often dozes half the way to Laterham. Only the other day, I waked him up myself. It isn't safe at all, only Polly is so steady. I sat on the floor of the cart and waited. By the time we had gone half a mile, he began to breathe more heavily, and when we reached that long, lonely piece of road, I sat up and looked, and there was no one in sight. Wallis was fast asleep, or stupid. I took the post bag and tore it open, I threw it with all the letters into the muddy road, but I tossed the packet out by the half-mile gate, on to the grass, where I knew I could pick it up easily. I took the sack, I stood up and slipped it over his head, and tipped him backwards off the seat into the bottom of the cart. Then I jumped

down and ran off. For though he woke up bewildered, he made a clutch at me as he upset. I think the shock of it all helped to sober him. He began to struggle and shout, and I knew he would be free very quickly. I heard Mr. Proser answering him at the other end of the lane. There wasn't a minute to lose, and I had made up my mind I would not be caught. Except to pick up the packet, I never stopped running till I came to the Lodge gates. The turn of the road hid me, but I heard people running behind. When they find the bag, they will think whoever took the letters, dropped them, frightened at being so nearly caught. That's just what I want them to think. And they were very close," she ended, with a slight shudder, "they took the other turning, or I think they must have seen me."

So far, the Count had stood listening in silence, amazed at the strength of will and purpose suddenly revealed in this slight creature. But with her confession came the partial relaxation of the tension which held her. For the first time this evening her lips began to tremble.

"Help me," she said. "Tell me what I should do next."

"You have gained time," he said, and his very voice carried a ring of assurance with it. "Thanks to you he is safe for the present."

"Ah, Cousin," she said, "I am not ungrateful. If it had not been for you this evening, I might not have had time. When you came up I was in despair. I had just put it back. You saw me there at the back of the cart, and I—I could think of nothing but Paul. No one else knows—" once again the shamed flush mounted to her very brow. "No one else knows that I have played the part of a thief."

"*Mon enfant*," he said, quietly, "you must not think such a thought again, or say it. You have forgotten that you are not acting for a responsible, but for a temporarily irresponsible person; irresponsible, I mean, on one subject only. You have that to remember, and nothing else."

He spoke in all sincerity. If the parcel had been mysteriously and unaccountably missing, and the postman unable to offer any explanation, he would certainly be held responsible for the loss; but so far, drunkard though he might be, his honesty had never been impeached, and now, the Count knew well enough, far from receiving blame, the man would rank as a hero. The tale would go the round of all the village alehouses for the next few weeks, till something more exciting took its place. Save for the issues involved, save for the tragedy of the whole thing, he could almost have laughed, in his intense admiration at the quick woman's wit which had so daringly made a plan, and carried it through; wit sharpened by love, for which man seldom finds himself a match. But the risk had been a frightful one.

"No," she said, speaking now with slow, pained distinctness; "I think no one will blame Wallis. He made noise enough. And I have done all I can for Paul, so far; for the present he is safe. He has no second copy of the play; it cannot, therefore, be submitted to the French manager. Its loss will come to him as a crushing

disappointment, and the affair cannot end here. It is only just beginning."

He looked at her with a great compassion visible on his own face. "I suppose such a thing has not happened before? His work for the paper has never been affected?"

"No, no," she said, "all his articles and essays are so good, so original; even M. Réport is satisfied with them. It could never have happened at all, only Paul overworked himself when he had those dreadful headaches last winter, and he was not fit for his exam. when he went up. There have been worries, too; money troubles and other things; worries I can do nothing for—" here she flushed and paled again. "And this year has been a very trying one. He has begun a second play of his own. If only we can keep him from finding out! The future will be quite different; it will never happen again, I can feel it." She spoke with ever-increasing difficulty. Her words came in short, painful sentences, and when she broke off, the anguish in her face might have well belonged to someone pleading for a life against the inflexible negative of destiny, the *habet* or non-*habet* of some tigerish fate. An uncomfortable lump came in the Count's own throat as he listened to her.

"Yes, yes, I see, I understand," he said. "You are quite right. We must not exaggerate the cause for alarm. By your own showing, his work for the French papers has never been affected; I should hope myself that it is never likely to be. He is under an engagement to write short articles for the present. As you say, his time will be very much taken up. His own private work will have to be neglected in consequence. And with new interests you think this freak of brain and memory possibly may fade, may be forgotten? That the play possibly may never be re-written."

Henrietta's head drooped again. "No," she said, "I do not think it. For the present he is safe, but there is the future to be thought of. Of course, for the next few weeks he will hope to recover the play, and then, from the day he gives up hope, he will begin to re-write it. I know beforehand what he will do."

"He must never re-write it," said the Count.

"You don't know Paul. Nothing short of the truth would stop him. He will re-write it, unless—"

"Unless he is prevented," said the Count, quietly. "Unless he can be induced to finish writing this second play, while waiting for the recovery of the first."

"He is not likely to be persuaded," said Henrietta. "How can we stop him without rousing his suspicions? You don't know Paul as I do. Even as a boy when he came here first to live, I felt all the time that he would go back to France, directly he was grown up. No matter how many people tried to prevent him. When once he has made up his mind, I have never known him change it yet."

"All the same," said the other, reassuringly, "you do not seem to realise how much time you have gained. Granted, that in six weeks your cousin begins to re-write his play, he can scarcely hope

to complete it under six months, with all his other duties on hand as well. A year's work is not quickly recovered, even if aided by a good memory."

His air of quiet conviction, the very common sense of this last suggestion brought a sudden ray of comfort to Henrietta's heart.

"No," she said, "he can scarcely hope to get it re-written in six months; it is an unusually long play, with a year's work in it, and he has no second copy."

"And he will never recover the first, *mon enfant*. You are the very last person he would be likely to suspect. You must know that."

"Oh, yes," said Henrietta, with a world of quiet anguish in her voice; "he trusts me absolutely. You are quite right. I have his entire confidence. So far as I am concerned, it should not be difficult to deceive him."

"You must not forget," he said again, "that we are not acting for a responsible, but for a temporarily irresponsible person. You talk about deceit, but who would be cruel enough to risk telling him the truth. Besides, think of Madame de Follet."

"If the Countess knew it would kill her," said Henrietta; "but if Paul were to find out—" she could not finish the sentence, remembering, say rather, never having forgotten, the effect produced on the Comte de Follet by a similar revelation. This thought had winged her footsteps this evening: it lurked behind every word she uttered.

"Paul is not likely to find out," he said, "for the next few months your mind ought to be at rest on that point. During that time a great deal may happen. New interests will come into your cousin's life, new work, new aims. For myself, if I were you, I should hope for the best, and at any rate we have time before us to plan what should be done next."

"Yes, yes," she said, under her breath, "you are quite right, but sometimes life is very cruel."

"I know," he said, slowly, "I know just what you are feeling. Uncertainty of any kind is very hard to bear; but if anything unforeseen happens," here he looked at her very pitifully, much as an old campaigner might look at a young soldier wounded for the first time, "if darker days come, I have no need to tell you that Paul's future does not depend upon our poor management. There is a Providence that shapes our ends, *mon enfant*. It is a true saying, though we are apt to forget it, God knows if only we are able to play providence ourselves, in however poor a fashion."

Later on, in a moment of utter despair, his words came back to her like a holdfast, a strong rope leading away into unknown darkness.

"I think I shall be able to set your mind more at rest later on," he added. "I shall be seeing a good deal of Paul during the next few days, and you—you will be very little with him."

He foresaw her next difficulty already. He knew well enough that to this girl's white soul belonged no camping ground or debatable ground, shading off imperceptibly into good or evil so that no

landmark could tell positively where the one ended and the other began. He knew the line of demarcation lay there sharply drawn, an unmistakable barrier. He knew deceit to be as foreign to her nature as light to darkness.

To be obliged to play a part with Paul during the next few days, to discuss his loss, to feign sympathy, would, he guessed, be almost beyond her. She had no genius for deception, and to play such a part successfully, a part utterly opposed to one's natural instincts takes nothing less than genius.

Henrietta looked at him gratefully. There was something mesmeric, something compelling in this man's manner, that nameless sense of attraction which inspires confidence. To-night his words carried with them the sense of assurance she so sorely needed. He would be seeing a good deal of Paul. He would help her not to betray her secret.

She drew a long breath of relief, stood up and threw back her waterproof cloak. The two pairs of eyes met above her clasped hands, above the packet so far safely hidden, safely held. Without a moment's hesitation the Count stooped and possessed himself of the play.

"You can't take this back with you, you must let me have it, I will keep it quite safely."

Released of their burden, Henrietta's hand stretched itself out to him involuntarily.

With gentle persuasion, he began to lead her across the grass. "The next thing for you to do is to get home before you are missed," he said, with an instinctive appeal to her own good sense. "I had tea at Godwin's Rest, with your mother, to-day; I suppose you did not know it?"

She shook her head, understanding now why no summons had come to her at five o'clock. When the Count came to call, Mrs. Godwin liked to talk nominal business uninterruptedly.

Wearily enough the girl went on now towards the house: too tired out to think of anything but the necessity immediately in front of her, of reaching her own room unobserved. With instinctive prudence she made for a side entry, a small lobby with a glass door opening into the garden, communicating with a narrow passage leading into the inner hall. Coming with her to the very door her companion with fingers as gentle as a woman's, took off the dripping cloak and cap and hung them up: then he said: "Promise me to go and rest. Promise me that you will hope for the best."

She looked up at him now without a word, and the expression in her eyes he never forgot.

But as he walked away his own face darkened. "Poor boy," he reflected. "Its a forlorn hope. His mother suffered from those intense headaches. Pity his literary projects and his own life are so bound up together. Report said to me only a few weeks ago that his work was extraordinarily mature and brilliant for such a youngster: too good he feared to last. That determinately over clever, over active De Follet brain is apt to be a cursed inheritance.

Still he is half a Godwin. That child's face to-night! I shall never forget it. She could fight a losing game every step of the way. And to think he will never know it!"

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

"It's a mystery, I say, and what do you think about it all, Mr. Holdaway?"

The person addressed, seated in the village reading-room, shook his head sententiously. He had not been landlord of the Godwin Arms for thirty years without learning something of the wisdom of the serpent, and his friends declared him to be mindful of the latter half of the exhortation as well. He looked round now at his questioner, and at the circle of curious faces opposite, the room being unusually full this week, with a humourous expression in his own twinkling black eyes, an expression not belied by the curves of his shrewd, good-humoured mouth. "A man don't always speak his thoughts, leastways, unless he's a fool," he said, "Mr. Jeremiah Shutter, here, will tell you that much."

Jeremiah, placed in the post of honour, an oaken settle on the right of the hearth, nodded his head, with a laugh. Holdaway was his brother-in-law, and the two men were on very good terms, though Jerry seldom went to the Godwin Arms, being an avowed teetotaler. Whenever he could, he spent an hour at the village reading-room, for what he called 'sociability.' His presence there never failed to act as a magnet to the carter boys, and to most other people as well. The man was a born teller of good stories, and he and Wallis might have been said to divide the sympathies of the village between temperance and drink, since the reading-room combined with its books and newspapers all the attractions of a coffee-house.

Jeremiah himself, always drank *eau sucre*—four lumps of the best white sugar in a glass of spring water, a habit learnt abroad and persisted in, to the immense admiration of some people and the scorn of others. Certainly, as Holdaway said, Jeremiah was a wonderfully healthy man, but that counted for nothing, indeed, might be reckoned the other way, for some folks were born healthy, and it must be an uncommon tough constitution that could stand sugar-water. Why, even the bees, poor creatures, only took to it kindly when nature could do nothing more for 'em. And, as Ragget, the village Radical, once remarked, Mr. Shutter took sugar-water when other people were looking on, but who was to say what he took in his own pantry at Godwin's Rest?

On this particular evening, however, no one paid much attention to Jeremiah. The attack on Wallis and the robbery of the post bag afforded far more stimulating food for gossip, and Holdaway, presumably the last person who had seen Wallis before the latter started along the Godwin's Worthy road, found himself the hero of the hour.

Of course, the postman himself should have been there to be interrogated, but unfortunately he lay at the moment in great suffering at his own cottage. For nearly a week he had complained of a nasty pain in his side, now declared to be pleurisy, and at the present moment he was far too ill to pay any attention to stray visitors. In the meantime, four days had elapsed since the robbery, and no trace of the thief could be found. It was a mysterious affair altogether, as Ragget said. Many of the parcels and letters having been picked up in the road, it yet remained to be seen how much of the mail was missing. It was understood that Wallis felt the hands of two men upon him. They had jumped into the cart and attacked him from behind, and no one could expect a man to fight with a sack over his head.

"Wallis ain't always very wide awake on a Saturday night," said Ragget, addressing the landlord with a wink. "How was he when he left you, Mr. Holdaway, if I may venture to ask?"

Holdaway puffed away at a short pipe, and eyed his interrogator coolly. He was no admirer of the village Radical. A man who couldn't drink good beer for more than a week at a time without getting laid by with an attack of rheumatism, might deservedly be reckoned a poor creature; while Wallis, a seasoned toper, willing to sing a song at any time, and never failing in amiability, or requiring to be forcibly ejected, could always be reckoned upon as a good customer, and as such, had nothing to fear at the hands of the proprietor of the Godwin Arms.

"How was he?" he repeated. "How should he be, eh? Mine is good beer enough, but a drop of hot whisky and water before he left might have saved him from the pleuresay, poor chap."

Ragget sniffed contemptuously. "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Holdaway, that Wallis don't see double some Saturday nights?"

Holdaway took out his pipe with the leisurely air of a philosopher. "Godwin's Worthy is a curious place, Mr. Ragget, as I said to Mr. Proser only this evening, when he came to see me, a very curious place. But one thing's certain, 'taint safe to say 'yes' or 'no' to anyone in this parish; or it's you that's said it, t'other end of the village, before a man can get there himself. You comes here sir, says I, and you says to me, 'Wallis was drunk last Saturday night, wasn't he?' and I say, says I, 'no sir!' Then you go along, and you says, sir, 'Mr. Holdaway,' says you, 'says Wallis wasn't drunk last Saturday.' No! When a man looks for a bit of gossip, or asks a question uncalled for, I don't say yes, not I, because then you see it's me that said it; and I don't say no, certainly not, then I should be a contradicting the rector, and the rector is a very worthy gentleman, but he don't stand contradicting; takes the pulpit about with him, so to speak—he's used to letting himself run down without any interruption. No, I looks at him as I looks at other people, and I just says 'Ah!' That don't tie a man down to anything, not if it comes to the Assizes. And so, says I, Mr. Proser, sir, I never forgot what you said, only a week ago, in your sermon, that we ought not to take away a fellow-creature's character unnecessarily, and I am sure you would be the last person to wish me to do it," and here

Holdaway, having refilled his pipe and exhausted his breath, went on smoking.

"But the rector's the rector," said Ragget, insinuatingly. "You might tell a man a good deal more than you do, all in a friendly way."

"Maybe," said the other, "I take people as I find 'em. There's nothing left for anyone to tell you—nothing leastways that you can't find out; you said as much yourself last week. Because you see—" here Holdaway, to whom Ragget's last score still remained owing, waved his pipe and looked round in a leisurely way on the small circle, sure of support—"because, you see, you are a political man, Mr. Ragget, and politics is a mighty big matter, including everything. Politics is a mighty sea (unconsciously he imitated Ragget's own voice and his favourite expression when laying down the law)—politics swamps everything. I'm a plain man myself, but I ain't swamped, and I don't set up to be wiser than my neighbours, or the Queen, God bless her, or the eddicated gentry."

"But it's the eddicated gentry has got the land," said Ragget, who always turned sulky under Holdaway's chaff, and who could never talk connectedly on any given subject.

"So they have," said the other, "and small blame to them, says I, if they've a mind to keep what they've got; but there, that's beside the point. There's one thing, Mr. Ragget, I've always had a respect for which you never will."

"And what may that be?" said Ragget, fiercely.

"Secrets," said Holdaway,—"other folk's secrets, and their good names, too, so long as they deserves them. And here's a health to Wallis, and may he soon be on his legs again."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and the toast was drunk with enthusiasm by everyone but Ragget, who pushed back his chair and stood up with a scowl. Worsted in many a passage of arms with Holdaway, he might certainly have been styled the most unpopular man in the village, while Wallis remained a universal favourite. Kind-hearted and sunny-tempered, the postman would not willingly have offended anybody. Even his wife, with pride worthy of a better cause, sometimes boasted to her next-door neighbour, Mrs. Ragget, that during all the years of her married life, Mike had never had words with her about anything, and as for raising his hand on a woman, drunk or sober, he couldn't do it."

The same could not be said for Ragget, who ruled his wife, not with a rod of iron, but far more effectually with a stick. On this occasion the sympathies of the assembled company were against Ragget, and he knew it.

"The 'fluenzer's' in the village, anyhow," he said, with the air of a man firing a parthian shot, "and Mike Wallis has the 'fluenzer' as well as the other thing; I heard the doctor say as much myself this afternoon. You will see, all of you, it's a toss up if Mike gets over it."

A groan and a few hisses greeted this suggestion. Jeremiah, seeing that things had gone far enough, stood up, and laid his hand on Ragget's shoulder, "I may as well walk a piece of the way home

"with you," he said, "if you are going. Ever had the 'fluenzer yourself, Mr. Ragget?"

"No, and don't want to either," said the other, slightly mollified by the friendly offer, but scowling still at the faces in front of him. "And I've heard it's an uncommon dangerous complaint to those that has it, so there!"

"Sometimes maybe it's a deal more trying to them as hasn't," said Jeremiah, oracularly. "It's about a good deal. Madam's got it up at our house, so maybe we shall all take our turns." With which cheerful suggestion he linked his arm through Ragget's and strolled off homewards.

He could well fancy that the complaint might be very trying to those who hadn't caught it. Mrs. Godwin, or Madam as he always styled his mistress, suffering for the first time, and rather sharply, too, from the derided epidemic, had made life a burden during the last few days both to Sophie and Henrietta; though, with regard to the patience and devotion of Mademoiselle, the old bonne declared them to be past belief.

Mrs. Godwin had no high fever, but suffered for once with intense pain in her limbs, and with really acute neuralgia in the head. Judging by her lamentations, one might have expected her speedy demise. However, on this particular afternoon, the fourth since the attack began, the invalid begged for her novel, and for the blind to be slightly raised in case she could read for a few minutes. The book proved interesting, and Henrietta, finding herself no longer needed, slipped away to the attic upstairs.

Paul would be leaving next morning, and she had promised to pack up his books for him. She had a cold herself, and felt poorly to-day, but scarcely heeded either cold or cough, while her busy fingers dismantled the attic—her childhood's sanctuary. Paul was not there; since the preceding Saturday the two had seen less of each other than usual, and this evening Henrietta knew that he would be dining at the Grange, the Duchess, quit of influenza but still confined to her room, having expressed a wish to see him.

While her mother's indisposition was at its height, Henrietta detained upstairs, realised that the enforced seclusion could not have come at a more opportune moment. Not in the least likely to be questioned, far less suspected of the robbery, the mere thought of hearing it discussed, or of talking it over with Paul turned her sick. Transparently truthful by nature, how could she buoy him up with false hopes! For Paul knew that the packet was missing, that it had never reached Laterham, and had already offered a reward for its recovery. Henrietta's own few words of remorseful sympathy he had met with a smile. Always reserved, he had said little about his loss; but his very silence, springing from strong feeling, cut Henrietta to the quick.

Fortunately for the strain upon her self-control, few visitors had called this week save Ted and M. de Brie. Mr. Proser, Wallis himself, and half the village were down with the influenza. Thirty years ago the complaint, as severe as it is now, visited Godwin's

Worthy first, and passed next through Laterham, traveiling steadily, as doctors have often watched it travel, from one place to another. The epidemic, a general one, had disabled half the servants at the Grange, and many of the out-door men, not to speak of the farm labourers.

Dr. Clifford's hands were well filled, but so far fortunately, the cases were not of a severe type, and, save for an attack of pneumonia here and there, few people's lives were in any actual danger, with one exception. Gentle Miss Lavender struggled through three days of high fever, and then, though the attack soon passed, Dr. Clifford saw that she would never leave her bed again. Her heart, always weak, became more affected, and she lay suffering little or no pain, but in a state of hopeless prostration.

She had asked to see Henrietta, and the girl, finding herself at liberty, had made up her mind to go over to the Nutshell late in the afternoon. Meantime, her hands went lingeringly over Paul's books—most lingeringly of all over the thick volume of Hans Anderson's Fairy Tales. The attic, her childhood's sanctuary, seemed haunted by her cousin's presence, by the thought of the happy hours they had spent together in companionable silence. A safe refuge never marred or stained by one harsh word, one satirical speech. A room where she had seen Paul's work grow to completion, only to wrest it from him by her own deliberate act. But a short time ago she could have bidden him God speed, with the hope in her own heart of his future literary career, if of nothing else. Now, the dark shadow of her childhood lurking in the background, had assumed a more threatening shape, and between him and it, she and the Count stood alone, never knowing when it might elude their watchfulness.

This afternoon she finished her task with mechanical care, though the look of the empty bookshelves almost upset her self-control; almost, not quite, thanks to that power of self-repression cultivated by some natures, power able to keep a strong hand on the reins of feeling, mindful in time of the hurricane which can so easily sweep all before it.

Here in the attic, Henrietta knew well enough the curtain was falling on the second act of a drama. The dismantling of the book-case came to her as a foreshadowing of her own departure. For the first time she realised fully that Godwin's Rest was let; and her natural womanly conservatism, her inwrought dread of change and loss, accentuated by her afternoon's work, suffered more than it had ever suffered before. Human nature is the same all the world over. Whatever brightness the coming years bring with them, there are recollections of our childhood that linger with us always, like the perfect dawn from which we step out first; a dawn holding a glad joy, a vivid brilliance never to be won again till death, who for tired souls has the sweetest face of all angels comes to us through the twilight, singing the song of release.

Tired out to-day, with an aching head and an anxious heart, Henrietta presently crossed the room, leant her arms on the window sill, and looked down into the garden.

It was the beatiful time of the afternoon; shafts of sunlight were

creeping across the trees, slipping from tree-top to tree-foot, in a sideways glow, gliding downwards from branch to branch, turning the silver of the meadow willows to gold, lying in pools of fire on the grass, shifting traceries of shadow to sunlight, of golden bloom to golden darkness, mellowing the world into a splendour of light that seized and flooded Henrietta's whole being. A magic radiance found sometimes in unset jewels, or in the heart of a wood fire, where the shadows and the transparencies lose themselves, depth within depth. And yet no simile can give river lights, or the sunshine seen through dark trees, because nature holds a strange mystery, never to be spelled by anything as hard as words. The hand of an enchanter rests here, and the quivering branches and flying leaves are the strings that vibrate beneath his hand.

Peculiarly attuned to the influences of colour and of atmosphere, Henrietta knew all this well enough. The garden held no tree or flower that was not wound up with her heart, even from the day long ago, when the grass and daisies by the pump seemed quite tall to her baby eyes, and when the waking light through diamond-paned, latticed windows, had come to her each morning like a fairytale of freshness. When only seven years old, she had loved it all hand in hand with Paul, passionately, voicelessly, with a rapture of content. As children, they had shared everything together, from the solitary copper beech tree on the highest terrace, to the horse-shoe lily of the valley bed, and the first monthly rose bush, the first blue convolvulus grown in their own tiny garden. Trees and flowers called to her to-day, and only her silence answered them.

The glory, the bloom of the world! But a sting lay coiled up in it all since last week. She could express it faintly in music, but Paul, so far she had believed Paul would depict it far more gloriously. And now the knowledge that his hard year's work did but portray his own unconscious theft, the fear that his future might repeat his past, shattered her hopeful confidence at the outset. Her whole soul rose in the prayer written in so many thousand hearts: "Save him from this, whatever comes to me." For our own sorrows if undiscovered by the outside world, are generally bearable, but it is just this irremediable sorrow of some other life, which drives good women at times, and strong men too, to the very borderland of despair. Henrietta knew well enough that she and Paul had come hand in hand to the cross-roads, and must there separate, each going on a different path: one life sustained by love, the other dogged by tragedy.

Tired, and strangely disinclined to move, she sat looking out of the window till the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravel brought her downstairs. Ted and the Count had ridden over; the former enquiring particularly for her, had asked if she would be able to see him.

Scribbling two lines on a half-sheet of paper, Henrietta gave the impromptu note to Jeremiah. Three minutes later, leaving Paul and the Count in the library, Ted made his appearance in Mrs. Godwin's boudoir. Here he found Henrietta.

"I wanted to see you for one minute by myself," she said, "before we have tea."

"Did you think I should object?" he said, laughing. "Is it four days or four months since I saw you last, Hetty?"

"It feels like a year," she said under her breath. Then she flushed crimson. One hand went to her pocket, and she drew out a small packet carefully done up and sealed. "I want you to do something for me, Ted—something horribly unreasonable." She spoke with an air of forced lightness, but her colour came and went, and her voice shook as if she had lately been running.

"It's the very first request you have made me," he said, with grave gentleness; "the more unreasonable the better."

Henrietta smiled; somehow, her expression filled him with a sudden, acute uneasiness.

"The other day," she said, slowly, "I was very interested in that book you lent me, *Alcirat*; you said you wanted Paul to read it, that I could hand it on to him afterwards. He was not in the room at the time."

"No," he said, conscious of some perplexity, but not showing it in his manner.

"I want you," she said, with increasing difficulty, "never to mention the book to Paul. I want you," with a sudden, nervous look, completely opposed to her usual simple confidence. "I want you to put it away somewhere where no one can possibly come across it for the next few days. I want you not to discuss the book with me before anyone. I have a good reason, only I can't explain it yet—even to you."

For sole answer he took the book and dropped it leisurely into the heart of the fire. Then he stirred the glowing coals together, and put down the poker.

Henrietta looked at him, startled. "But I thought it was such a valuable book. You oughtn't to have done that," she said, with an unmistakable note of relief in her voice.

"I wonder what is the value of your peace of mind," he said, meditatively. "Can you tell me that, Hetty?"

"You think too well of me," she said, with a sudden catch in her breath, suspiciously like a sob. "And you have never asked me to explain."

"Not till you wish to tell me," he said, quietly. "Some day, Hetty, you will have to give me all your worries as well as yourself."

Apparently the vice of curiosity had passed him by at birth. If he had been Eve, the serpent would never have got into Eden. But looking at her this minute, the touch of mingled passion and patience in his glance affected Henrietta strangely.

With a gesture of simple and complete confidence she drew nearer to him, resting her head against his shoulder, like a tired child,

"You think too well of me," she said again, slipping one hand into his, "but you mustn't, Ted, or someday you will be disappointed."

Later on, the two joined Paul and the Count in the library. Here they found tea waiting for them. The conversation inter-

rupted by their entrance, flowed on again in the same channel—fortunately a safe one, the influenza being the subject under discussion.

"It's an old complaint," said Ted, leisurely stirring his coffee. "Clifford was saying to me, to-day, it's a very good test of character; it brings out the original Adam. My mother has treated it as she treats everything else. I have never known her make a fuss about anything; but Proser is simply furious. After coming down to breakfast at eight o'clock for thirty years, and demonstrating that a well-ordered life never succumbs to minor ailments, he can't forgive Providence for laying him up."

"Some people never make time to be ill, only to die," suggested the Count. "People arrange their lives so very differently to fit their own ideas."

"Do you think they arrange them at all?" said Paul, suddenly. "It seems to me that each existence is mapped out beforehand, but in some lives so much of the past still lingers, that no place is left for the present."

He spoke, moved by an impulse, scarcely realising the significance of his own words, while his glance followed Henrietta's fingers as they moved among the old Wentworth china. The Count's eye penetrating but kindly, noted the lines round his mouth, and the slight hollows on the temples which had no right to show themselves in so young a face; and yet the face, for all its youth, could scarcely be called a young one.

"No two men take up their lives from the same point," he said, easily, more with the object of attracting attention to himself, than of thrashing out Paul's assertion. "Some men start at the end and go backwards, effacing a darker record maybe at every step, instead of dyeing it deeper. Other people look ahead, and begin in the middle of their lives, and some men never start at all; while some few, very few, are so busy giving their care to those less fortunate than themselves, that they never seem to play a part at all, except as prompters;" here he looked at Ted and smiled. "A few commit suicide at the outset, and the rest, like myself, plod along, looking out for all the spare seats by the wayside, particularly when they come across a lady in possession, who keeps a place for them."

He took a cup of coffee from Henrietta with an air that had a touch of something more than courtesy in it, while Ted enquired whimsically, who had ever heard him giving people their cues?

"I should say no one," the Count answered. "A good prompter is never heard or seen by the audience. Once upon a time," he went on meditatively, "I used to flatter myself that I might make a superb stage manager, but I soon found out my mistake. One can never be sure in real life of what is going to happen next, and if one can't make the performers play up to the house there is the dickens to pay. Now—well I don't set up to manage anything, but when once a scene has begun I like to forecast the end of it, and events bear me out just sufficiently often to satisfy my vanity. Take Proser for instance. You are all too hard on him. I wouldn't

mind wagering that he will get up quite an interest in his own symptoms, and in breakfast in bed by the time he is about again. Without practice it isn't given to everyone to play the part of an invalid gracefully, and given an uncongenial part it takes a genius to play it successfully."

Involuntarily Henrietta drew a long breath. Ted hearing the sigh came closer to the tea table: "That's just what I've been feeling all the week; how can I be expected to behave well downstairs while you remain up, Hetty. I hope your mother is really better?"

"Henrietta has been invisible since Sunday," said Paul. "I am not sure she hasn't had the influenza herself sympathetically." He spoke with a note of affectionate concern in his voice. While to the admiration of one onlooker Henrietta's hand did not tremble as it raised the coffee pot: but Ted watching her became conscious for the second time to-day of a sharp pang of uneasiness.

"Even in the very temple of delight  
Veiled melancholy has its sovereign shrine."

And he caught an expression on the beautiful face which could not have been there unless born of suffering.

He stood quietly by the tea-table saying little, saving her trouble in various small ways, and presently suggesting that she should come out into the garden and let him read to her—the reading undertaken at such times being purely nominal.

"I have promised to visit Miss Lavender," Henrietta said, "so I mustn't be tempted to let you read to me to-day, Ted."

"Which reminds me," Paul chimed in, "Hetty won't hand me on the book you lent her."

"Quite right," said Ted. "Hetty can always be trusted with my property." He leant forward with a careless gesture, helping himself to a lump of sugar, and completely screening the slight figure behind the tea pot. At the same instant the Count's cup slipping from its saucer, poured out a stream of coffee, and fell to the ground, where it broke into several pieces. Everybody's attention was drawn to him instantly, and in the midst of his apologies Henrietta left the room, only to come back again with her hat in her hand, and followed by Jeremiah, who carried a clean cloth and applied it solicitously to the Count's coat. The latter, after making his peace easily, begged Henrietta not to delay her visit to Miss Lavender on his account, saying that he would be off almost immediately, but that he had a small matter of business to settle with Paul before wishing him *bon voyage*. At this announcement Ted rose with a matter of fact air, announcing he would walk with Henrietta as far as the Nutshell; De Brie could easily catch him up later on.

"But your horse," said Henrietta.

"Phantom can walk too," said Ted, smiling down at her, "and if I see you safe to Miss Lavender's Paul can fetch you home again." Equally as a matter of course Paul assented, and the other two set out together without further delay.

Henrietta's manner betrayed a slight touch of nervousness this afternoon, but Ted did not seem to notice it. He sauntered along, talking easily, winning a promise of a drive on the following day, and leaving his companion at Miss Lavender's gate far more rested than when she set out.

But after he had mounted his horse, a docile, beautiful creature, so far led by the bridle, he rode away more slowly than usual. "If Mrs. Godwin were Balaam," he murmured, "and you, Phantom, were Balaam's ass, she would not only hit you over the head half a dozen times a day: she would be furiously displeased if your first speech were not an apology."

"She has had no mercy on Henrietta this week, and Hetty has strained every nerve to keep things going. Having done her utmost I daresay she is carrying about with her a damning consciousness of failure to come up to the required level; the conviction that her presence is barely supportable. It shan't go on. That woman would exhaust anyone but De Brie. I wish he would speak if he means to. But what in the name of wonder induced him to upset his coffee to-day?"

By which it may be inferred that love sharpens a man's wits amazingly, particularly when they are far from being dull at the outset.

*(To be continued.)*

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